

D O W N T O W N

E L S O B R A N T E



TRANSPORTATION AND LAND USE PLAN

Prepared for the Contra Costa County Community Development Department

■ prepared by ARUP • BMS Design Group ■ in association with Pittman Associates • Mundie Associates ■ December 2001 ■

DOWNTOWN EL SOBRANTE

TRANSPORTATION AND LAND USE PLAN

A “Transportation for Livable Communities” Project

Prepared for the

**Contra Costa County
Community Development Department**

Project Co-Sponsors:

94803 Task Force

El Sobrante Chamber of Commerce

Contra Costa County

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission

December 2001

Prepared by:

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In Association with

Pittman Associates

Mundie & Associates

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE PLAN IN BRIEF	1
BACKGROUND	3
Introduction	
The Planning Process	
Location	
Purpose of the Study	
COMMUNITY GOALS	6
Transportation and Traffic Vision and Goals	
Landscape and Design Vision and Goals	
Business Environment, Activities and Recruitment Goals	
Additional Vision Statements	
Suggested Strategies	
PLANNING CONTEXT	9
Existing Land Use Context	
Existing Transportation and Traffic Conditions	
Economic Context	
Regulatory Context	
THE TRANSPORTATION AND LAND USE PLAN	18
Section 1. Plan Principles	
Section 2. Future Development Pattern	
Section 3. Land Use	
Section 4. Transportation Framework	
Section 5. Open Space Framework	
Section 6. Urban Design Concepts	
Section 7. Landscape Framework	
IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY	56
Community Plan Implementation Organization	
Individual Private Landowners and Businesses	
Public Sector Initiatives	
Phasing	
Early Action (Phase 1) Public Implementation Actions	
Early Action (Phase 1) Improvement Costs	
Next Steps	
APPENDIX A	
Downtown El Sobrante Market Analysis	
APPENDIX B	
Project Team	

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>Title</u>
Figure 1	Bay Area Context
Figure 2	Regional Context
Figure 3	Study Area
Figure 4	Existing Land Use
Figure 5	Existing Traffic Level of Service Diagram
Figure 6	General Plan Land Use
Figure 7	Existing Zoning
Figure 8	Subdistricts
Figure 9	Existing Street Framework
Figure 10	Proposed Street Framework
Figure 11	Proposed Land Use
Figure 12	Proposed Street Operation
Figure 13	Street Types
Figure 14	Pedestrian Circulation
Figure 15	Parking Location Concept
Figure 16	Open Space and Parks
Figure 17	El Sobrante Village Center (Concept Sketch Plan)
Figure 18	El Sobrante Village Center Aerial View
Figure 19	Section A: Village Center Drive (cross-section)
Figure 20	Section B: Street Character in the Village Center Drive (cross-section)
Figure 21	San Pablo Dam Road in the Village Center
Figure 22	Section D: San Pablo Dam Road Character in the Village Center
Figure 23	Section E: San Pablo Dam Road Outside of the Village Center (cross-section)
Figure 24	Section C: Village Center Drive East
Figure 25	Gateway to Downtown El Sobrante at El Portal Drive
Figure 26	Landscape Framework
Figure 27	Early Action (Phase 1)

THE PLAN IN BRIEF

The Downtown El Sobrante Transportation and Land Use Plan will create a vibrant “full service” downtown with a stronger retail base, restaurants, commercial offices, public spaces for social and cultural events, small parks, walkways, apartments and condominiums.

The new downtown will provide an appealing, accessible shopping district that will attract local residents and visitors alike.

Specifically, this long-range plan will bring the following benefits to the downtown area along San Pablo Dam Road between El Portal Drive and Appian Way:

- A new Village Center of approximately 25 acres will be located along a large block formed by four streets. The streets that will form the focus of the Village Center are a portion of San Pablo Dam Road, between Hillcrest Road and Pitt Way; an improved Pitt Way; an improved Hillcrest Road; and a new east-west connecting street known as Village Center Drive. The Village Center will have a mixture of shops, offices, residential units and a public plaza, to serve as a focal point for the downtown area.
- Redesign of the San Pablo Dam Road cross-section from a five-lane roadway. Currently the road is four lanes plus a dedicated center lane that allows left turns into driveways throughout the corridor. The road will be reconfigured to provide four lanes with wide sidewalks

in the Village Center portion of San Pablo Dam Road and four lanes with a landscaped median in areas outside of the Village Center.

- A revised pattern of land uses in the downtown. Currently, much of the land in the downtown is devoted to automobile-dependent uses and are not conducive to a pedestrian-oriented neighborhood commercial district. These uses will be encouraged to gradually relocate over time to other more suitable areas of the County and a new mix of downtown uses will be encouraged through incentive and regulatory programs. A total maximum mixed use development of 375,000 square feet of commercial space combined with up to 580 residential units are possible according to the land use framework of this plan. Traffic studies indicate that if this maximum capacity were achieved, traffic within the downtown would not exceed acceptable county standards.
- Landscaped streets and wider sidewalks in the Village Center and along the entire length of San Pablo Dam Road.
- Traffic calming measures and pedestrian improvements on San Pablo Dam Road, making it easier to walk or bicycle in the downtown and easier to cross the street.

- Attractive street furnishings for bus stops and other public places along the street.
- Redesigned commercial properties along San Pablo Dam Road with storefronts located along the sidewalk and shared parking lots behind the businesses to encourage visitors to park their cars and walk around the downtown area.
- A total of approximately 1000 parking spaces in the downtown located in a combination of shared lots (established through a Parking District), private lots, and on-street parking. This is an increase of approximately 250 spaces over the current condition, most of which is now provided in numerous individual, on-site lots. Shared, concentrated parking will improve the pedestrian environment and visual appearance of the downtown.
- New downtown parks and open space including a new Village Center Park suitable for community gatherings, an improved and expanded Library Park, and two new creekside parks at the western end of the downtown.

The plan strikes a balance between the dual uses of San Pablo Dam Road as the access road to downtown El Sobrante on one hand, and a regional route on the other.

Some aspects of the plan likely can be accomplished within a couple of years, but other aspects are longer-term and may take five to ten years or more, depending upon funding, market conditions for development, and other factors.

The planning process was co-sponsored by Contra Costa County, the El Sobrante Chamber of Commerce, the community-based 94803 Task Force, and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC). MTC provided a \$50,000 "Transportation for Livable Communities" grant that financed most of the consultant contract for the project. Additional funds came from the Chamber of Commerce, County Public Works Department and Community Development Department.

BACKGROUND

Introduction

The El Sobrante Transportation and Land Use Plan is the result of a year-long process involving residents, business owners, citizens and Contra Costa County staff with the goal of improving the economic and physical environment of downtown El Sobrante, an unincorporated area of western Contra Costa County.

The elements of the Plan described in this report are initial concepts and are not final policy of Contra Costa County. Rather, they are intended to provide direction for further planning efforts for the downtown, including additional detailed studies leading to future capital improvements in the downtown area.

The Planning Process

This plan had its origins in a downtown visioning workshop that was conducted in El Sobrante in January 2000, at which about 75 residents and business-persons gathered to offer their views on the downtown commercial district. The visioning workshop was sponsored by the El Sobrante Chamber of Commerce and funded with a \$40,000 Community Development Block Grant. A professional planning firm, Communities by Design, was hired to facilitate the workshop and help participants establish a vision for the downtown.

The visioning workshop resulted in agreement on the need to revitalize the downtown area. One of the key recommendations from the workshop was to create a community task force to lead the downtown improvement effort. The result was formation of the 94803 Task Force, named for the El Sobrante zip code. The Task Force became a co-sponsor of the downtown revitalization effort, and formed three subcommittees – a Landscape and Design Committee, a Traffic and Transportation Committee, and a Business Committee.

Subsequently, the Task Force and its subcommittees identified goals and initial strategies for improvement of downtown El Sobrante. These are summarized in the Community Goals section of this report.

In September 2000, the transportation planning firm of ARUP, in association with BMS Design Group (urban design), Mundie Associates (economics) and Pittman

Associates (environmental) were selected by the 94803 Task Force and Contra Costa County to prepare specific transportation and land use recommendations that would help achieve the goals established by the Task Force. This report is the result of that work effort.

The work process has included meetings with a 19 member Steering Committee, a Town Hall meeting to introduce the study to the community and four community meetings. Individual presentations also were made to various organizations including the El Sobrante Joint Planning Effort, the Aquatic Outreach Institute, the El Sobrante Rotary Club, the El Sobrante Municipal Advisory Council, downtown residents, St. Callistus Church, and the West Contra Costa Transportation Advisory Committee.

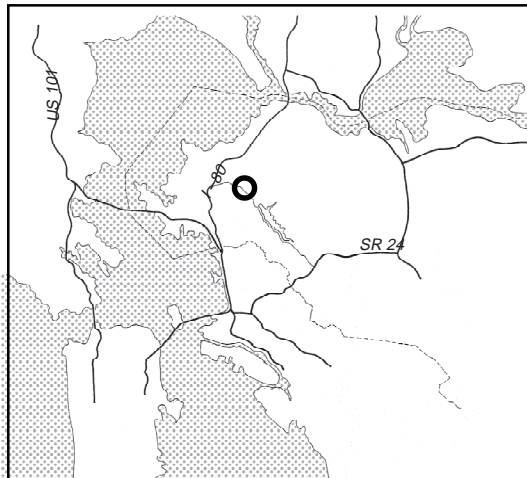


Figure 1. El Sobrante in the context of the San Francisco Bay Area.

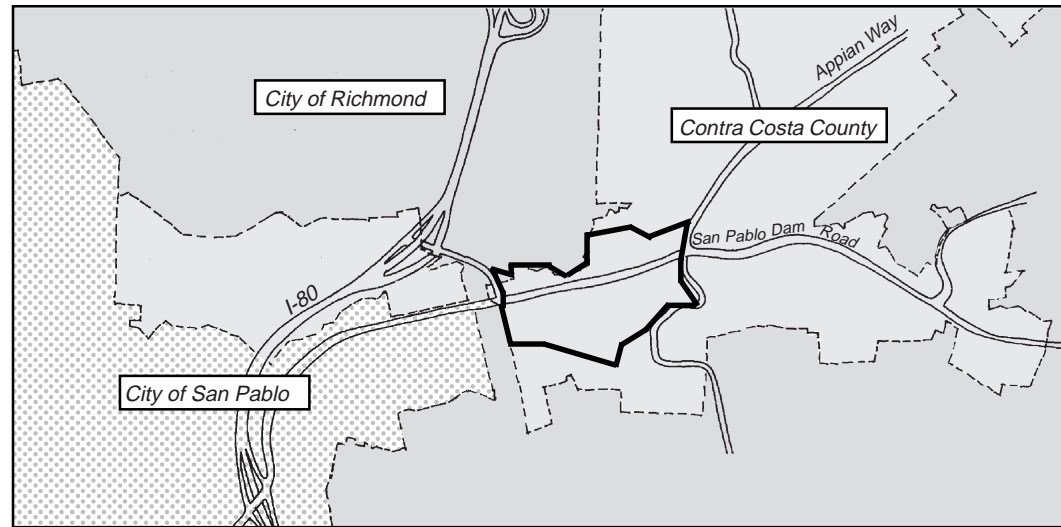


Figure 2. El Sobrante is located at the intersection of three jurisdictions: the City of San Pablo, the City of Richmond and Contra Costa County.

Location

Downtown El Sobrante is located along a ½ mile portion of San Pablo Dam Road between Interstate 80 and State Route 24 in the East Bay region of the San Francisco Bay Area. It is situated in the El Sobrante Valley at the intersection of three jurisdictions: Contra Costa County, the City of Richmond and the City of San Pablo.

The physical landscape of Contra Costa County varies widely, from the urbanized shoreline of the Bay in the west to the Diablo Mountain Range to the east. The El Sobrante Valley lies in the western portion of the county, in a semi-rural pocket of low density residential development and local-serving businesses, surrounded by the highly developed urban and suburban areas

that typify the I-80 corridor. The natural landscape of the area is characterized by rolling hillsides, oak trees, creeks and lush vegetation, all of which contribute to valley residents' appreciation of the area's woodland character. San Pablo Creek, which flows out of San Pablo Reservoir above the downtown area, passes through the downtown parallel to San Pablo Dam Road on the north.

Purpose of the Study

Historically, San Pablo Dam Road between El Portal Drive and Appian Way has served as downtown El Sobrante's local commercial and retail area. Until the 1950's the corridor was a vibrant center containing shops, restaurants, small department stores and grocery stores serving local needs. In recent years, however, urban growth patterns in the surrounding area have resulted in a shift in commercial activity to areas outside the downtown, with a resulting decline in economic activity. At the same time, increasing development in the surrounding region has increased traffic demands on highways in and adjacent to El Sobrante. San Pablo Dam Road now functions as an important commute corridor for West Contra Costa County.

Today the economic decline and increased traffic along San Pablo Dam Road has resulted in a 5-lane roadway (4 lanes plus left turns). Motorists often speed through the area at speeds well in excess of the posted 25 mile per hour speed limit. Acres of parking and an abundance of auto-serving uses such as auto repair, gas stations and auto sales dominate the area. The area has become almost entirely dependent on the use of the automobile, with poor facilities for pedestrians, transit and bicycle users.

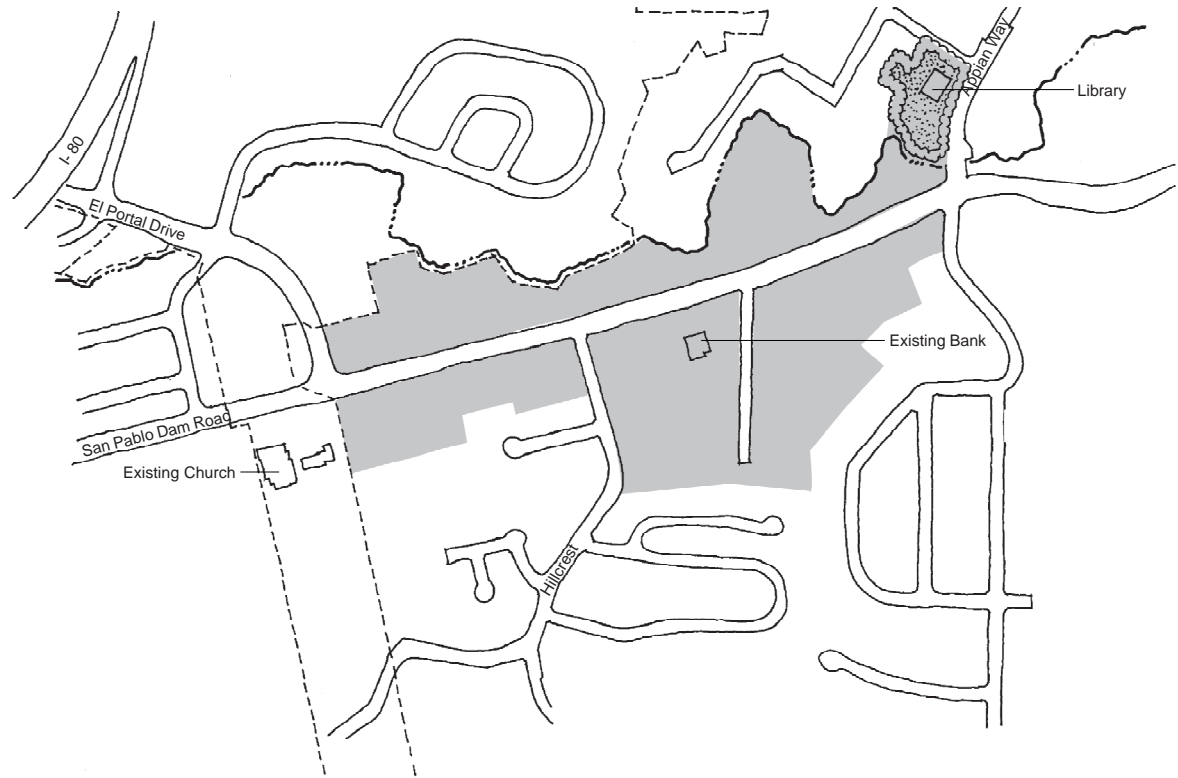


Figure 3. Study Area

The purpose of this study is to define a plan to reverse the economic, transportation and development trends that have occurred in the area over the past 40 years and reestablish a pedestrian-oriented mixed use neighborhood commercial district.

Legend

- Study Area
- City/County Boundary



0 500

COMMUNITY GOALS

During the workshops and meetings held between January and July 2000, the 94803 Task Force and its subcommittees defined vision statements, goals and initial strategies for the revitalization of Downtown El Sobrante. These goals focused on three subject areas:

- Transportation and Traffic
- Landscape and Community Design
- Business Environment

Generally, the vision statements and goals can be summarized in a desire to create a pedestrian friendly, mixed-use neighborhood commercial district with a range of goods and services to serve local needs. The following is a summary of the key elements of the goals and vision statements prepared by each of the three subcommittees.

Transportation and Traffic Vision and Goals

Vision Statement of the 94803 Transportation & Traffic Committee:

"We envision the creation of a friendly, attractive, village-like downtown through improved circulation and parking in the downtown area, slower traffic, increased pedestrian/bicyclist safety, and alternative transportation from neighboring areas."

Transportation-related goals included:

- Separate local shopping traffic from traffic that is just passing through on San Pablo Dam Road.
- Provide parking convenience for local shoppers.
- Improve the downtown pedestrian environment for local shoppers.
- Improve local traffic circulation downtown.
- Improve connections between downtown and adjacent residential areas.

Landscape and Design Vision and Goals

Vision Statement of the 94803 Landscape and Design Committee:

“To help restore the business district as the vital core of the community and a destination offering a diversity of activity, business, and points of interest, incorporating outdoor settings that invite people to linger.”

Design-related goals included:

- Install and maintain attractive litter receptacles at bus stops and major intersections.
- Honor businesses that are contributing to the beauty and vitality of the area with awards and publicity.
- Work with business owners and a certified arborist to replant trees which add beauty downtown without obstructing storefronts.
- Acquire park sites to beautify and enhance the downtown shopping experience.
- Work with business owners and code enforcement officials to facilitate a visually pleasing standard for signage that will attract customers.
- Commission public art to add to the charm and beauty of downtown.

Business Environment, Activities and Recruitment Goals

The vision statement of the Business Environment Committee is as follows:

“Downtown El Sobrante has a reasonable variety of businesses that are owner-operated and friendly and provide products and services customers want. The Chamber of Commerce facilitates cooperation among merchants and sponsors events, such as the El Sobrante Stroll, that bring people to downtown El Sobrante.”

Business-related goals included:

- Develop and expand programs for downtown customer sharing.
- Sponsor a “Paint up/Fix up” program to improve the appearance of downtown businesses and buildings.
- Determine what new businesses would help the business mix and develop a focused program of business recruitment.
- Expand the programs for community events that attract people downtown.

Additional Vision Statements

“...an attractive, inviting, lovely place to visit for a variety of community, civic, cultural, entertainment, recreational as well as commercial activities, a vital core that is the heart of El Sobrante Valley...Walkways, open space, visual and aesthetic vistas, biking, etc. will be a part of this oasis.”

“The configuration or reconfiguration of large monolithic buildings that stand out like islands in a sea of asphalt must be of concern to the consultant. Either they should be moved up to the street (sidewalk) or they must be changed so the parking lot has new stores, walkways, landscaping, open spaces, etc.”

“We want to be a full service downtown, with all the other amenities that result from streetscaping, landscaping, traffic calming, public open space (i.e. civic, cultural, entertainment, recreation, etc.)”

Suggested Strategies

The 94803 Task Force and its committees generated many ideas to help achieve the community's vision. Most of these ideas, which are listed below, have been incorporated into the Transportation and Land Use Plan. Not all of these strategies can be achieved, however, since some are in conflict with one another or are not feasible.

1. Pedestrian crosswalks (with traffic lights) to create a pedestrian-oriented downtown.
2. Bikeways, bike lanes and bike parking facilities.
3. A parallel street to San Pablo Dam Road (to improve circulation and parking, and provide a means to turn around for motorists along San Pablo Dam Road).
4. An intelligent parking plan.
5. Turn-a-bouts (rotaries) at intersections to improve circulation
6. Bulb-outs at pedestrian crosswalks.
7. Mini-parks, rest areas with benches, waste receptacles, flowers, etc.
8. Massive streetscaping, trees, plants, flowers.
9. Incorporate the creek visually and as a walkway/bicycle path, with due sensitivity to the residents across the creek.
10. Public spaces.
11. Appropriate housing in mixed-use form.
12. Wider sidewalks.
13. Improved lighting, with additional and more interesting lights.

14. Improved transit, with covered bus stops at convenient places. This will require that San Pablo Dam Road be reduced to two lanes, diagonal parking, and extensive landscaping which will make the parallel street an imperative to the livable downtown.
15. Complete reconfiguration of many buildings, parking spaces, lateral streets connecting the two parallel streets, and even pedestrian malls (a la Santa Barbara).
16. Create a pallet of color that relates the buildings, landscaping and the creek in a kaleidoscope of beauty and charm.
17. Try to find a theme for the buildings and landscaping that is not sterile.
18. A place for public art and murals.
19. Well-placed and attractive garbage receptacles.
20. A community center with space for seniors, day-care, meetings (large and small), town hall meetings, seminars, performing arts, concerts, exhibits, classic films, and classes.
21. Clean and attractive signage.
22. A monument, signature tree or other center of attraction.
23. The design must "flow" to take people from one end of the district to the other and back again.
24. A pedestrian bridge across San Pablo Creek.
25. Design guidelines to be used in future development in the downtown area.

Concerns Expressed on the Strategies

The strategies shown above were discussed at various stages of the public participation process. Strong concerns were expressed by downtown residents and property owners over two of the strategies in particular – strategy #3, the proposed parallel street to San Pablo Dam Road, and strategy #9, a proposed walkway along San Pablo Creek. Due to their concerns, both of these strategies were revised to be less extensive and less intrusive on neighboring properties than originally proposed. The revised concepts are shown later in this document.

PLANNING CONTEXT

As a first step in the planning process, a review of existing conditions in the El Sobrante downtown area was conducted. This included an assessment of:

- Existing land use context
- Existing transportation and traffic conditions
- Economic context
- Regulatory context

The intent of this assessment is to identify conditions that provide opportunities for improvements that will meet the goals of the community and the Task Force. The assessment also identifies constraints that must be overcome in order to meet the goals of the Task Force and community.

Existing Land Use Context

Figure 4 illustrates existing land uses in downtown El Sobrante. As the figure shows, many uses in the downtown do not support the general goal of a pedestrian friendly mixed use neighborhood commercial district. Most of the constraints to meeting this goal are related to the dominance that the automobile plays in determining land use patterns, including:

- An abundance of auto related uses. These are uses whose only purpose is to sell and service automobiles, such as used car lots, auto repair shops, gas stations, car washes and vehicle storage facilities. These uses are not frequented by pedestrians and are not a necessary component of a neighborhood commercial district.
- Auto oriented uses. These are primarily retail and restaurant uses that are oriented to automobile users and include restaurants, banks and pharmacies with drive in windows, as well as quick stop, “in-and-out” shops and restaurants. Such uses are not frequented by pedestrians, and their traffic patterns create sidewalk conflicts with pedestrians.
- Large areas of parking that separate land uses and are not conducive to pedestrian travel.
- Residential patterns and linkages. While there is surrounding residential development, connections to the downtown are virtually non-existent, requiring downtown patrons to use their cars from even the closest locations. Once in their cars, potential downtown patrons often bypass the

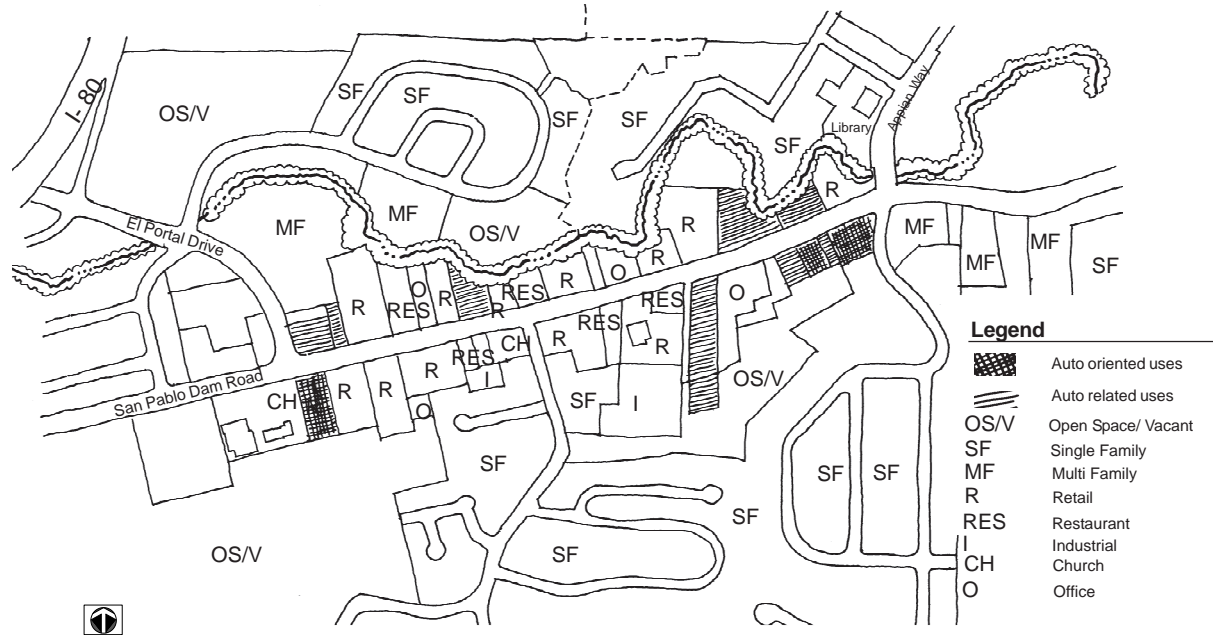


Figure 4. Existing Land Use

downtown to shop in other locations. Only Hillcrest Road provides a comfortable and attractive pedestrian link to the downtown.

Land Use Opportunities

Despite these constraints, there are numerous land use opportunities that can be capitalized upon to meet community goals. These include:

- Abundant nearby open land areas provide opportunities for residential infill that will give additional economic support to the downtown, particularly if good linkages are provided
- The availability of nearby open land that can be utilized to create new community commercial areas and open spaces.
- Numerous churches in and adjacent to

the downtown. These institutions provide stability to the area and opportunities to create community-building partnerships to provide housing and other uses that will support the downtown.

- Extensive parking areas that provide opportunity sites for redevelopment to new uses and open space (as long as the necessary quantities of parking are replaced in appropriate locations).
- There are a few existing pedestrian-oriented retail/restaurant uses. Most are remnants of the past downtown layout. These uses can be built upon.
- The adjacent residential areas are also an opportunity, since they are within easy walking distance of downtown. It is simply a matter of providing convenient pedestrian connections.

Existing Transportation and Traffic Conditions

San Pablo Dam Road serves as a regional route for through traffic as well as an access to local residential and business areas. This creates tensions between those in the community that value speed and efficiency over those who want to see traffic slowed to establish a more pedestrian-oriented downtown and better retail environment. The study objective has been to review the role of San Pablo Dam Road and offer a balanced response to these competing needs.

Regional Setting

San Pablo Dam Road is designated a Route of Regional Significance by the Contra Costa County Transportation Authority. It provides a major link in the regional network connecting I-80 at Richmond/San Pablo and SR-24 at Orinda. Studies undertaken by the Contra Costa Transportation Authority show that while the road is used by some motorists as a through route (between I-80 and SR-24), the majority of traffic on the road is generated locally. In El Sobrante, two-thirds of the peak hour traffic is using San Pablo Dam Road as an access between I-80 and Richmond and home origins/destinations in the wider El Sobrante area.

Level of Service

Several types of traffic standards are used in Contra Costa County to gauge the performance of the transportation system. One type of standard is called "level of service" (LOS), which grades streets and intersections on a scale ranging from "A"

(free flow conditions) to "F" (extreme delays). The County's minimum acceptable LOS standard for all intersections on San Pablo Dam Road is "D", except for the intersection with Appian Way where the standard is "E". These standards are set forth in the *West County Action Plan for Routes of Regional Significance*, published in 2000 by the West Contra Costa Transportation Advisory Committee.

Another set of traffic standards was established in the *Corridor Action Plan for San Pablo Dam Road and Camino Pablo*, jointly published in 1998 by the West Contra Costa Transportation Advisory Committee and the Southwest Area Transportation Committee. These standards include rush-hour travel times no greater than twice as long as non-rush-hour times; waiting no more than one traffic signal cycle to pull onto San Pablo Dam Road from a side street; and an average of 1.3 persons per vehicle along the corridor.

Other goals include an average of 3,000 weekday bus riders and more facilities for pedestrian and bicycle access, by the year 2005. The Downtown El Sobrante Transportation and Land Use Plan will help accomplish several of these goals, as indicated later in this document.

Circulation

Currently it is difficult for motorists to turn around on San Pablo Dam Road in the downtown area. In particular, motorists traveling eastbound who miss the downtown location they are looking for, must drive several miles past the downtown in order to find a place to turn around

Traffic Speed and Pedestrian Circulation

Speed is a major issue in the downtown. The posted speed limit is 25 mph, but it is routinely ignored; the small number of pedestrian crosswalks makes it difficult to cross the street; and the volume and speed of traffic makes it difficult to make left turns into and out of parking lots and driveways.

Transit

There are five bus service routes that pass through the El Sobrante downtown operated by AC Transit. Two of these routes (669 and 679) only run on school days and run at school times. Of the others, routes 69, 70 and LB serve the downtown at 20-minute frequencies during the peak periods and provide access to local areas, the BART Stations at Richmond and El Cerrito del Norte, and San Francisco.

Bus boardings and alightings through downtown are relatively low, reflecting the poor accessibility of the bus stops from the local residential neighborhoods and the poor facilities provided at the bus stops.

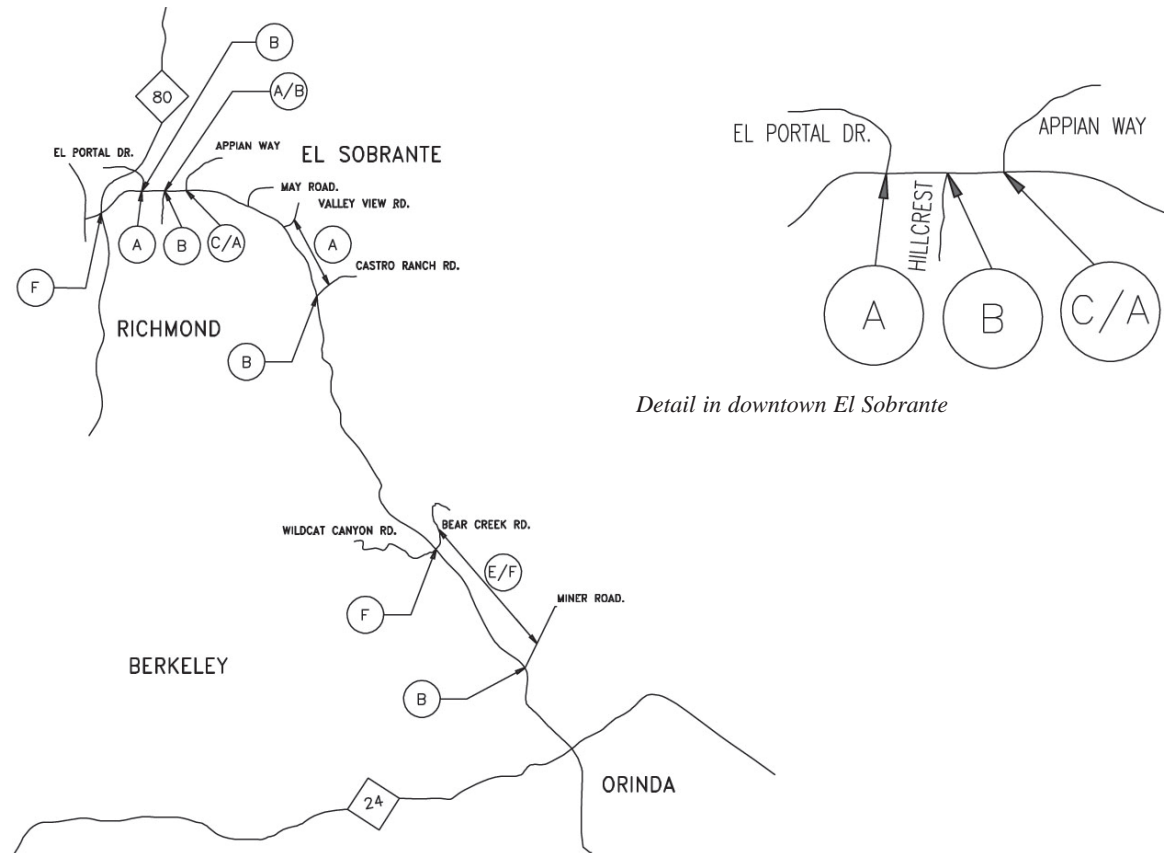


Figure 5. Level of Service Diagram

Source: West Contra Costa Transportation Advisory Committee (WCCTAC), Southwest Area Transportation Committee (SWAT); Corridor Action Plan for San Pablo Dam Road and Camino Pablo: December 23, 1998.

Summary of Transportation Opportunities and Constraints

Opportunities:

- Wide right of way cross section
- San Pablo Dam Road operating with good LOS
- Adequate parking
- Good accessibility corridor for bikes, transit

Constraints:

- High speeds
- Poor accessibility for pedestrians
- Perceived as good access to freeway – high traffic flows with mix of through and local traffic.
- Speeding common between intersections
- Parking is in dedicated lots
- Very little on street parking
- Bicyclists unprotected by bicycle lanes
- Pedestrian access to transit is poor

Economic Context

Several of the goals expressed by the community and the Task Force relate to increasing retail activity, particularly local-serving neighborhood goods and services. Downtown El Sobrante is challenged in its ability to meet these economic goals for several reasons, including:

- Distance from some residential areas
- Nearby competitive centers with an abundant variety of goods and services, especially the collection of retail uses at the Appian Way/ I-80 interchange and Hilltop regional shopping center
- Poor pedestrian connections from residential areas.

However, it is reasonable to anticipate that downtown El Sobrante can continue to exceed expectations about sales capture and the number of stores that can be supported by local retail spending. If downtown can evolve into an attractive place to shop, dine, and spend time a location in downtown El Sobrante for new businesses could be advantageous.

A good model for the type of place that would be attractive to new shoppers and diners is downtown Pinole, which has a high concentration of restaurants and specialty stores relative to the concentration of population in the immediate area.

Under these circumstances, it is reasonable to expect that downtown El Sobrante could

support one or two additional apparel stores, several additional specialty stores, and several additional eating/drinking places. All together, these outlets could add about 40,000 square feet of retail space in the downtown area.

Along with additional retail space, it is likely that a modest amount of new office space could be supported as well. Downtown El Sobrante boasts a strong array of some types of services, but lacks others. Previous studies of small-city downtowns completed by Mundie & Associates indicate that 25 to 35 percent of all outlets are offices and service establishments of some type. In El Sobrante, the existing mix is significantly different: downtown has 40 retail outlets and 56 other types of establishments, including churches, community services, medical and dental offices, personal services, martial arts and dance/exercise studios, and many others. Assuming that the current ratio is appropriate for El Sobrante, then 8 to 10 new offices would also seek locations in downtown El Sobrante.

Properly arranged, new retail and office space could create a destination for shoppers interested not only in purchasing the goods they set out to buy, but also a pleasing recreational experience that includes window shopping, dining, and visiting with friends.

For a more complete discussion of the economic context of downtown El Sobrante, see "Downtown El Sobrante Market Analysis" prepared by Mundie & Associates, in Appendix A.

Regulatory Context

From a public policy perspective, the physical environment of downtown El Sobrante is largely shaped by two documents: the General Plan and Zoning Regulations. Both of these documents must meet state regulatory criteria and are adopted by the County Board of Supervisors. The General Plan sets general goals and policies for development throughout the County. The Zoning Regulations are intended to implement these policies and guide the development of specific areas.

While both documents *allow* development in downtown El Sobrante that could help meet the goal of establishing a pedestrian-oriented mixed use commercial area, they do not *restrict* uses (such as auto-oriented uses) that are detrimental to that goal. Therefore, modifications to the land use provisions of the General Plan and Zoning will be needed to encourage the appropriate mix of uses.

In addition downtown El Sobrante's location at the intersection of three jurisdictions hinders achievement of community goals. Each of the three jurisdictions has its own General Plan and zoning regulations, elements of which are not well-coordinated. One of the objectives of this Transportation and Land Use Plan is to define a framework for downtown El Sobrante that is compatible with desirable existing land use patterns, as well as set a framework for coordination of policies and regulations of surrounding jurisdictions.

General Plans

Figure 6 provides a composite illustration of General Plan land use, for the two jurisdictions in the downtown El Sobrante vicinity, Contra Costa County and the City of Richmond. While a detailed analysis of the plans is beyond the scope of this report, certain general observations can be made:

Contra Costa County General Plan

The County General Plan already provides policy support for many of the goals articulated by the community and identified in this Transportation and Land Use Plan. In particular it recognizes the negative effect of separation of jobs and housing and the resulting transportation impacts. It also supports infill of jobs and retail, in areas such as downtown El Sobrante. Relevant key general plan goals include:

- Achieve a pleasant transition between residential, industrial and commercial areas.
- Create urban areas in both appearance and function where residents can live and work without commuting.
- Create environments with both day and night activity in the more urban and commercial/residential mixed use areas.
- Provide adequate neighborhood commercial areas to serve the future needs of each neighborhood at buildout.

However, as Figure 6 illustrates, the General Plan promotes relatively low density residential development in areas directly

adjacent to the downtown which are currently open land or devoted to parking and auto-related uses. The downtown would benefit from General Plan policies that encourage slightly higher residential densities, thereby increasing the adjacent population to support the downtown and provide close-in housing for the elderly and others who could benefit from proximity to services and transit.

Other aspects of Contra Costa County General Plan that could be updated to help meet community goals include:

- Undifferentiated commercial uses along the entire length of San Pablo Dam Road from El Portal Drive to Appian Way. There is no identified "town center".
- Lack of mixed use in the County area. Residential mixed use is not encouraged
- The Circulation Element of the existing County General Plan calls for a "couplet" or pair of one-way streets in downtown El Sobrante. If the couplet was established, San Pablo Dam Road would have become a one-way street in the westbound direction and a new parallel street would be built as a one-way eastbound street from El Portal Drive to Appian Way.

The new parallel street described later in this Transportation and Land Use Plan is different from the "couplet" in three ways. First, it is shorter, extending only from Hillcrest Road to a point between Pitt Way and Appian Way. It specifically serves the proposed new Village Center and provides motorists an opportunity to

turn around if they need to. Due to its shorter length, it avoids a steep hill that might have to be leveled or partly leveled in the western part of the downtown if the couplet were to be built. The second difference is that the new street is two-way, and San Pablo Dam Road also remains a two-way street. Two-way streets are more conducive to downtown retail and pedestrian environments, whereas one-way streets tend to increase traffic speeds. Third, the new street is a local circulation street for downtown access, not a bypass or through route.

City of Richmond General Plan

As Figure 6 illustrates, most of the Richmond General Plan area surrounds much of downtown El Sobrante and is designated Mixed Use Residential. This designation has an important general goal to “create urban areas where residents can live and work without commuting”. This plan designation is quite compatible with the goal of creating a pedestrian-oriented mixed use neighborhood commercial area. While there is very little existing commercial development in the Richmond General Plan area, there is considerable high quality multi-family development directly adjacent to downtown El Sobrante that will help support the downtown if improved connections can be made.

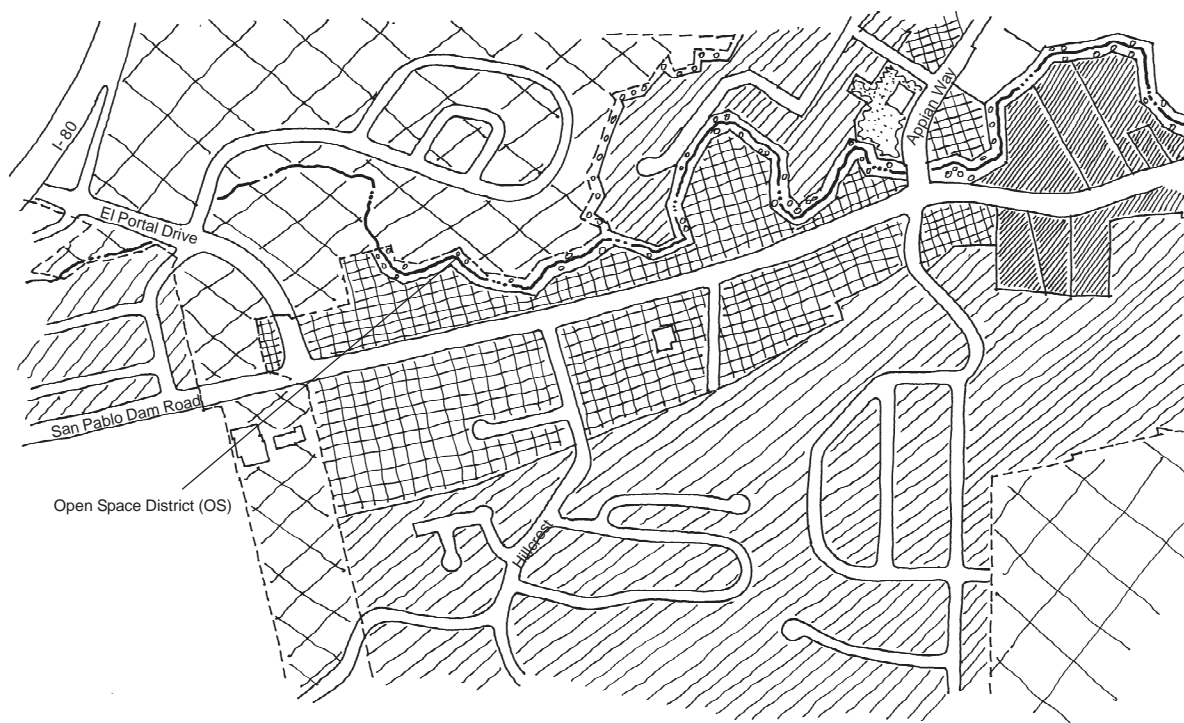








Figure 6. General Plan Land Use

Legend

-  Single Family Residential
-  Multi-Family Residential
-  Commercial
-  Mixed Use Residential
-  City/County Boundary
- 

Zoning

Zoning is the separation of a municipality into districts and the regulation of buildings and structures according to their construction and the nature and extent of their use and the uses of land. In general, zoning regulations are the legal mechanism that implements the policies of the General Plan and, therefore, they should be consistent with the policies of the General Plan.

Figure 7 provides a composite illustration of zoning districts of the three jurisdictions that comprise the El Sobrante downtown area. Current zoning contains several constraints to achieving the goals of a pedestrian-oriented mixed use neighborhood commercial district:

- Like the General Plan, each of the three jurisdictions has different zoning regulations, many of which are not coordinated to achieve common goals. The multi-jurisdictional El Sobrante Joint Planning Effort has been established to try to address these inconsistencies.
- Within the study area, County zoning regulations and General Plan designations could be updated to match community goals. Uses such as light industrial and various types of auto-oriented uses, for example, could be excluded from the list of allowable uses according to zoning.
- Residential densities vary widely among the three jurisdictions. Generally the City of Richmond allows higher density residential nearby, which can be supportive of downtown goals and objectives. Despite the

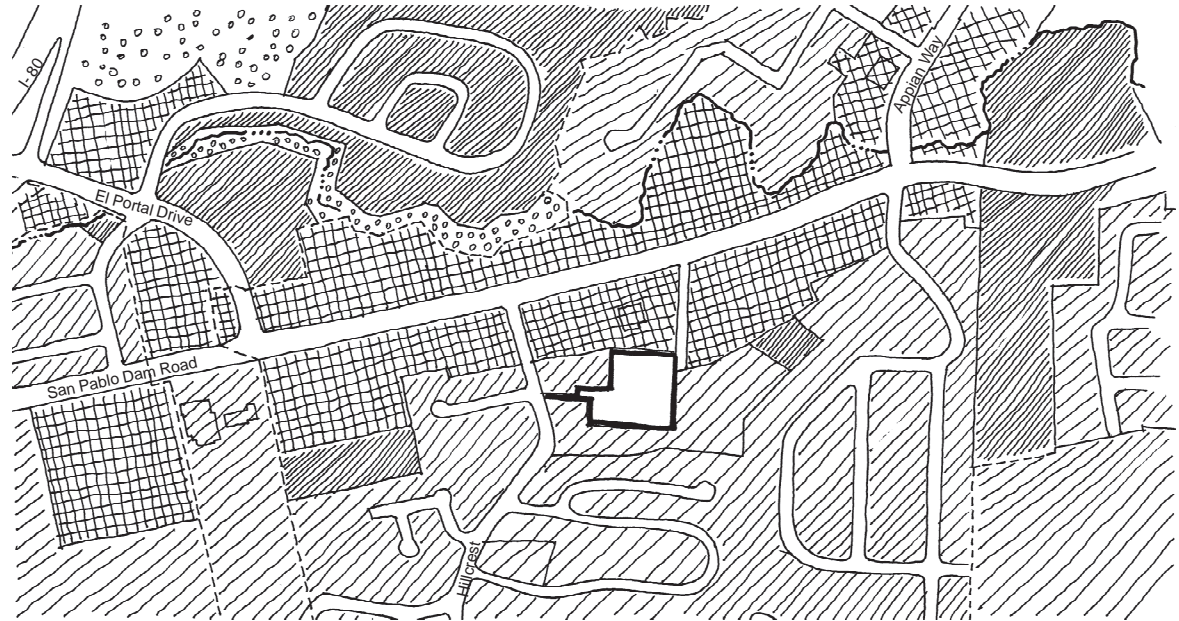









Figure 7. Existing Zoning from zoning ordinances of Contra Costa County, Richmond and San Pablo.

availability of abundant open land near the downtown, however, County zoning generally does not allow similar multi-family residential development that could help support downtown goals.

- City of Richmond zoning designates San Pablo Creek as an open space protection area, whereas County zoning does not, despite the fact that the County General Plan designates the creek as open space (OS).

Zoning for the area therefore will need some modifications to adequately support the community's vision for the downtown. Modifications to encourage mixed use development, promote a more urban street edge, discourage building setbacks, and encourage appropriate pedestrian-oriented retail or office uses will be needed.

Legend

	Commercial district
	Multi-Family Residential districts
	Single Family Residential districts
	Industrial districts
	Recreation and Open Space Districts
	City/County Boundary
	

Other Policy Documents

Various other minor policy documents affect the future development of downtown El Sobrante. Most of these can be adjusted as necessary to conform to future General Plan and zoning modifications.

In addition, one recent policy study, the El Sobrante Valley Parks Study, provides positive guidance in meeting the goals of the Transportation and Land Use Plan.

El Sobrante Valley Parks Study

In 1999, Contra Costa County and the City of Richmond jointly authorized and funded the “El Sobrante Valley Parks Study.” Due to their interlocking jurisdictional boundaries, both the County and the City recognized the need for a plan for future park and recreation space that would address the El Sobrante Valley as a whole. The study was adopted by the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors on January 16, 2001 and by the Richmond City Council in February, 2001.

The primary purpose of the study, as stated in the final report, is to

“identify sites within the El Sobrante Valley that may be developed into a system of parks and open spaces that addresses the current park land deficit, meets the expected increase in demand, and preserves areas characteristic of the region’s semi-rural environment.”

The study is very comprehensive. A key finding of the study found that the overall park study area (which exceeds the area of the Transportation and Land Use Plan) will

have a projected deficit of 50.21 acres of park and recreation lands, based upon existing population and estimates if all new, planned, or approved residential developments are completed. To meet this need, the Park Study identified several park sites ranging from pocket parks to community parks and linear parks throughout the valley that should be acquired, funded and improved to provide adequate levels of service. Recommendations included the following sites and strategies within the downtown El Sobrante area:

- Restoration of the El Sobrante Library site, including the portion of the site that abuts San Pablo Creek, with appropriate native vegetation to make a healthier place for plants and wildlife.
- Develop two pocket parks at the northwest and northeast corners of the intersection of San Pablo Dam Road and Appian Way adjacent to San Pablo Creek. The parks would provide a gateway to downtown El Sobrante with a signature design statement, seating, viewing deck and environmental interpretive elements.
- Locate a downtown site. The Park Study identified a 14.2 acre open site composed of five parcels located between San Pablo Dam Road and Hillcrest Drive, just west of St. James Drive. Most of the parcels that would be appropriate for a major park site are in private ownership. One of the parcels (4 acres) is owned by the County. Although it is not in the Transportation and Land Use Plan study area, it is directly adjacent, and

could serve downtown residents and workers. The Park Study recommended that, at a minimum, the 4-acre County-owned parcel be developed as a park.

- Linear parks. The Park Study recommended that in order to create a cohesive park system,

“recreation and natural resources should be interconnected by bike routes and trails. Roadways and creeks are excellent linkage corridors.”

While not specifically limited to downtown, it was recommended that San Pablo Creek and San Pablo Dam Road be developed to create a spine of open space that links to local and regional open space systems.

Many of the recommendations of the El Sobrante Valley Parks Study have been incorporated into the Transportation and Land Use Plan.

THE TRANSPORTATION AND LAND USE PLAN

The following sections describe the elements of the Transportation and Land Use Plan that have been developed (based on community input and goals), to establish a pedestrian-oriented mixed use neighborhood commercial district in downtown El Sobrante.

The Transportation and Land Use Plan includes seven sections:

- | | |
|------------|----------------------------|
| Section 1. | Plan Principles |
| Section 2. | Future Development Pattern |
| Section 3. | Land Use |
| Section 4. | Transportation Framework |
| Section 5. | Open Space Framework |
| Section 6. | Urban Design Concepts |
| Section 7. | Landscape Framework |

Section 1. Plan Principles

Six key principles describe the underlying philosophy that forms the basis of the El Sobrante Transportation and Land Use Plan:

- **A Bold Vision.** Task Force committees and community discussions have expressed visions and goals for downtown El Sobrante that are largely based on the idea that San Pablo Dam Road should be improved to become the downtown. This is not enough. A stronger vision is needed than one that focuses primarily on making improvements along San Pablo Dam Road alone. The Transportation and Land Use Plan therefore establishes a framework for future development that is intended to “create a whole new downtown” rather than simply cosmetically improve existing conditions.
- **The Role of the Automobile.** Excessive space (both inside and outside of buildings) devoted to the automobile negatively impacts the function and character of a neighborhood community. Downtown El Sobrante is a clear example of this. The Downtown Transportation and Land Use Plan will strike a new balance between land uses and designs devoted to the automobile and those devoted to pedestrians, open space, and other necessary community-oriented features.
- **Urban Infill and Smart Growth.** Many urban areas in Western Contra Costa County are currently underutilized or have been bypassed in favor of outlying greenfield development. The reuse and infill of such areas is an important element of sound urban development and smart growth. El Sobrante is an area that is well-suited for such infill, with available land, infrastructure and a solid surrounding residential base.
- **Strong Neighborhoods.** Strong neighborhoods need strong community centers to provide goods and services that serve neighborhoods within easy access to all members of the community. The Downtown El Sobrante Transportation and Land Use Plan is designed to provide a framework for these activities to take place.
- **Critical Mass.** A strong community must have a focus or center of activity, which provides a critical mass of economic activity, identity, and a source of pride to the neighborhood. This center must be scaled to the size of the community, both economically and physically, to assure success. A key principle of the Downtown El Sobrante Transportation and Land Use Plan is, therefore, to establish a focused high-intensity “Village Center” within the planning area.
- **Residential Development.** Residential development can enhance the economic success of community commercial areas when they are placed in close proximity to one another. Therefore, a key strategy of the Downtown El Sobrante Transportation and Land Use Plan is to plan for additional residential areas with good pedestrian connections to the downtown wherever possible.

Section 2. Future Development Pattern

A new development pattern will be established for downtown El Sobrante that will not be limited only to improvements along San Pablo Dam Road but will also create an expanded vision of new development areas containing a mix of uses to support economic development and promote an attractive physical environment. Two components of the future development pattern provide the overall structure for future development:

- Subdistricts
- The Framework of Streets and Public Access Corridors

Subdistricts

The future El Sobrante downtown will contain three recognizable subdistricts, each of which will have a different design character and functional role within the community. Figure 8 illustrates these districts.

The **Village Center District** is an area of about 25.5 acres located approximately in the geographic center of the downtown, extending from San Pablo Creek on the north to the undeveloped hillsides on the south. The area currently has abundant open land along the southern hillsides. It also has considerable underutilized land which is devoted to auto-related uses and parking. Much of this open and underutilized land will be developed as a pedestrian oriented core commercial area for the downtown. For a complete description of the Village Center, see [Section 6 Urban Design Concepts](#).

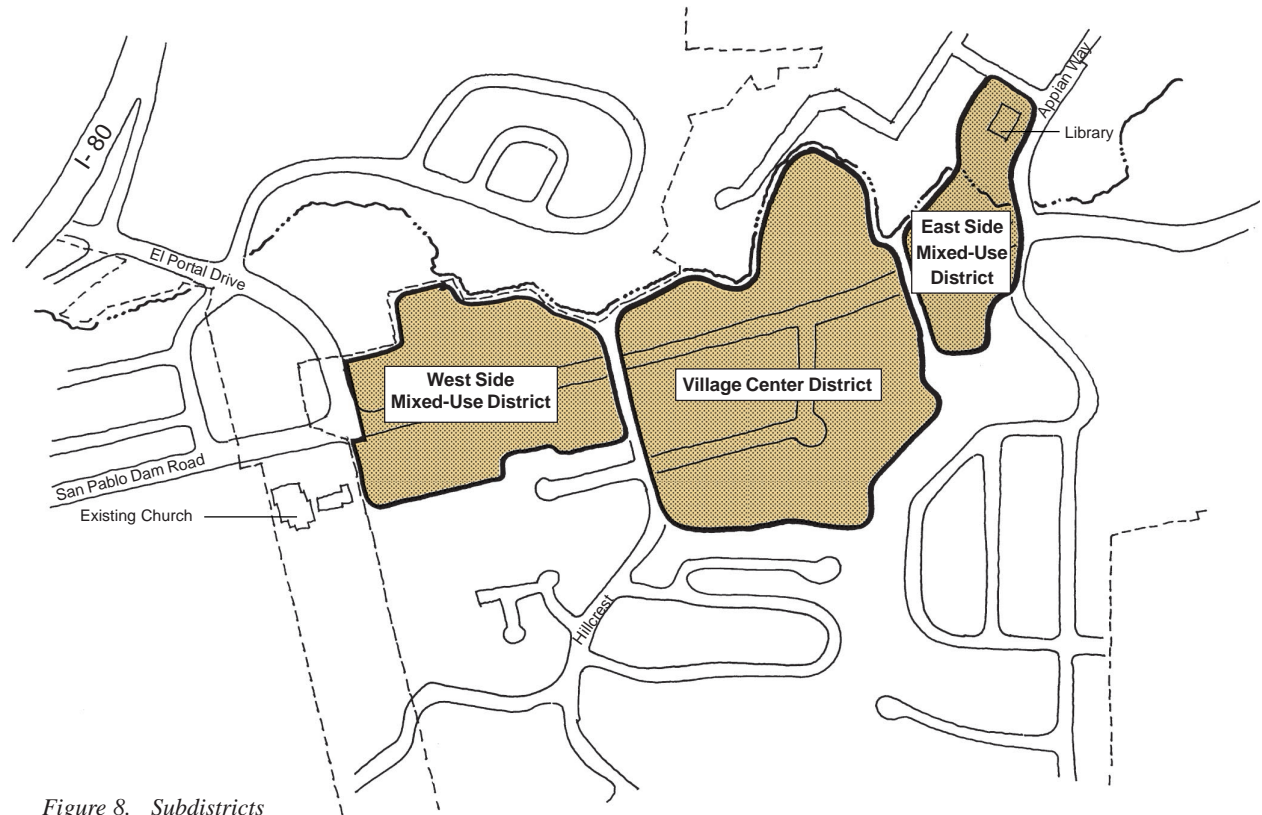


Figure 8. Subdistricts

The **West Side Mixed Use District** extends along San Pablo Dam Road between El Portal Drive and Hillcrest Roads. The approximately 14-acre district will include a mix of uses and will be designed to promote pedestrian activity along San Pablo Dam Road.

The **East Side Mixed Use District** extends along San Pablo Dam Road between the Village Center district and Appian Way. The approximately 9-acre district will have a similar mix of uses as the West Side District and will include connections to the upgraded Library Park.

Legend

- Existing Streets
- - - - - City/County Boundary



Framework of Streets and Public Access

A new pattern of streets, pedestrian ways, and open space will provide a framework for future revitalization and development of downtown El Sobrante. Figures 9 and 10 illustrate the existing and proposed framework of streets and open spaces. Key features include:

- A framework of existing and new public streets and pedestrian ways, which approximate a partial grid, will be established to improve local circulation throughout the area. To the extent practicable, this grid will provide a logical framework of streets and blocks appropriate to a mixed use pedestrian-oriented downtown.
- The most important of the new streets will be Village Center Drive that will extend from Pitt Way on the east to Hillcrest Road on the west. This street will run parallel to San Pablo Dam Road and provide a key link in the block of streets that will form the Village Center. It will provide new development opportunities for community uses along its length.

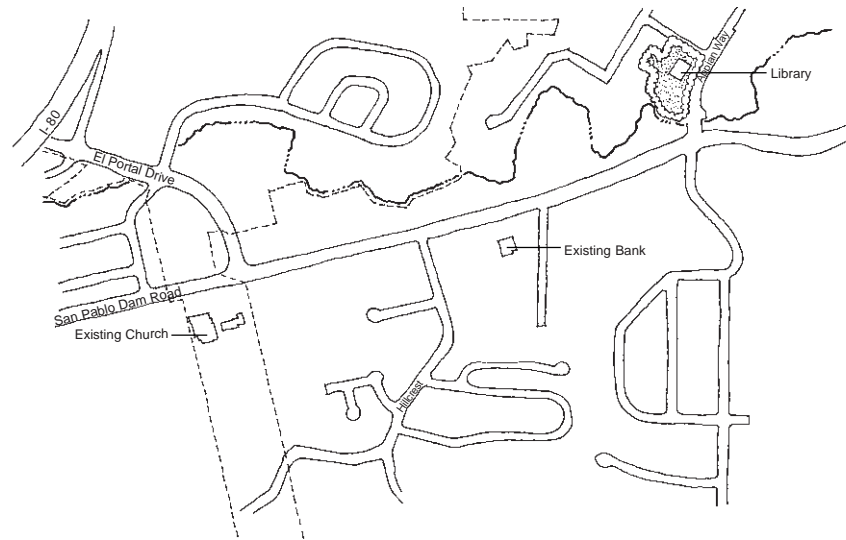


Figure 9. Existing Street Framework

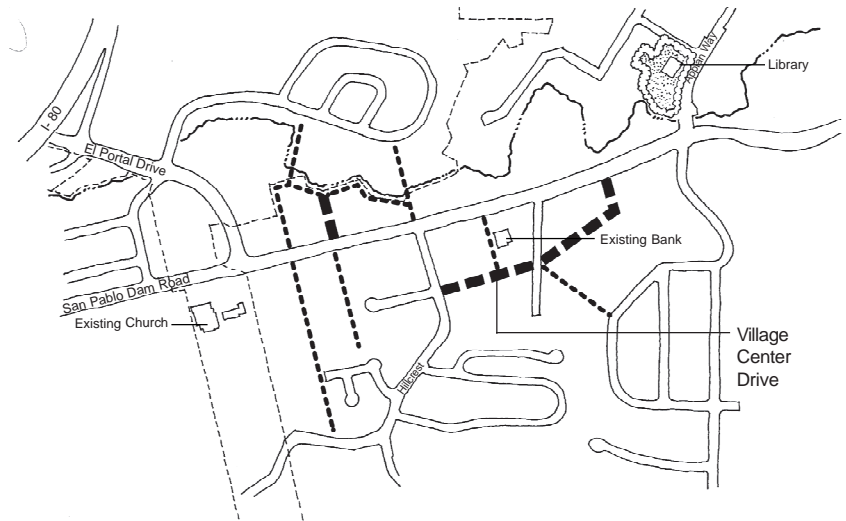


Figure 10. Proposed Street Framework



Section 3. Land Use

Figure 11 illustrates the proposed land use framework for downtown El Sobrante. In general, the land use framework is planned to:

- Preserve existing single family residential areas.
- Gradually relocate existing land uses that are incompatible with the goal of creating a pedestrian-friendly mixed use neighborhood commercial district. Such uses will be encouraged to relocate to other areas of the county (or nearby cities) that are more appropriate for these types of uses, such as designated industrial areas or “auto rows.” Uses to be relocated over time and discouraged in the future include:
 - Auto-oriented uses such as auto sales lots, auto repair, auto parts stores, junkyards, car washes and gasoline stations.
 - Auto oriented uses such as those with drive-in windows.
 - Vehicle storage yards such as the Pacific Bell yard at the end of Pitt Way.
- Promote pedestrian-oriented community-serving commercial uses along San Pablo Dam Road and in the new Village Center.
- Promote mixed-use development along San Pablo Dam Road and in the new Village Center.
- Allow for the development of multi-family residential development in areas that will create a transition between commercial areas and existing single family areas.

Three categories of land use are planned for downtown El Sobrante:

- Commercial/Residential Mixed Use
- Multi-family Residential
- Open Space

Following is a discussion of each of these use categories.

Commercial/ Residential Mixed Use (MXD)
To create a critical mass of activity within the overall corridor, mixed use development will occur in the new Village Center and along San Pablo Dam Road. Appropriate uses in the MXD areas include:

- Restaurants and coffee shops.
- Neighborhood retail such as hardware, groceries, pharmacies, and dry cleaners.
- Entertainment uses such as movie theatres, community playhouse.
- Multi family residential.
- Offices (however, the extent of ground floor office uses will be limited and will not exceed 150 linear feet in any block face.)
- Public institutional uses such as community buildings and library.

Typical combined maximum densities are not envisioned to exceed a net commercial floor-area ratio (FAR) of .25 plus 15 dwelling units/acre in mixed use or multi-use developments. If such densities were to be achieved throughout the mixed use area shown on the plan, total maximum potential commercial and institutional space would be approximately 375,000 square feet combined with a maximum total potential of approximately 500 residential dwelling units.

Multi-Family Residential

New multi-family residential development is planned to support commercial development and provide much needed attractive housing for residents of the East Bay region.

Multi-family is planned to be located in the Village Center as described above and in other areas where it will provide a transition between existing single family residential areas and the commercial areas of San Pablo Dam Road (see Figures 11 and Figure 17).

Different types of housing will be encouraged, including row houses, townhouses, and flats, to meet the varying housing needs of the community. Emphasis will be placed on programs and developments that encourage home ownership. However, provision will be made for affordable units, both for sale and rental.

Densities will vary depending on location and type of residential development. If an average density of 20 dwelling units per acre is achieved on the approximately 4 acres of multi-family land shown on the plan, approximately 80 additional new residential units would be provided.

Traffic studies indicate that this additional residential development, combined with total commercial/residential mixed use development described above, will not cause traffic congestion to exceed acceptable standards within the plan area.

Open Space

Open space is an important element of the land use mix of a downtown. New open space adjacent to San Pablo Creek and San Pablo Dam Road will be provided. In addition, a new Village Center Park is located at the center of the Village.

For a more complete description, see the Open Space Framework section and the Village Center discussion in the Urban Design Concepts section of this report.

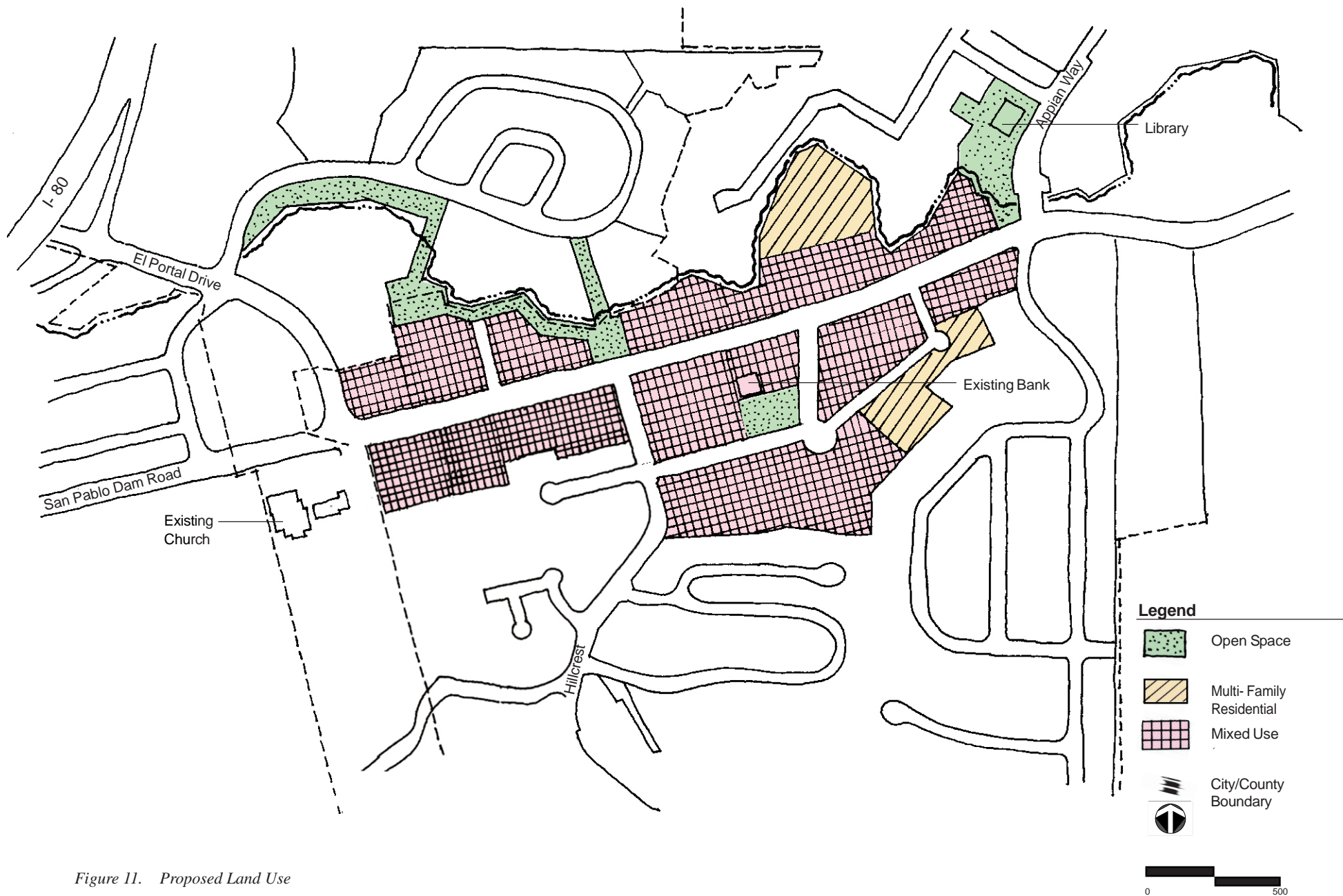


Figure 11. Proposed Land Use

Section 5. Open Space Framework

Figure 16 illustrates the future open space framework in, and adjacent to, downtown El Sobrante. The open space framework is closely inter-linked with the land use framework and the transportation framework to provide the following benefits:

- Enhance surrounding land uses, particularly the mixed use Village Center and multifamily residential areas.
- Provide enhanced pedestrian circulation and destinations.
- Provide passive recreational areas and community gathering spaces.

In addition the open space framework has been planned to incorporate recommendations of the “El Sobrante Valley Parks Study”, adopted by Contra Costa County and the City of Richmond in early 2001.

Four types of parks and open space will be developed within the downtown:

- Village Center Park, located in the heart of the Village Center. This approximately one-acre park will be a place for community gatherings, passive recreation and a symbol of the new heart of downtown El Sobrante. The site is well suited for the location of a small music pavilion, community meeting facility or sculptural element commemorating an important event or person in El Sobrante history. See also the Urban Design Concepts section, “Village Center Design Concepts”, for a description of this park.

- Creekside Parks. Three small creekside parks are located along San Pablo Creek. Two of these are located along San Pablo Dam Road in locations where the meandering creek comes very near the road, thereby opening the amenity of the creekside to the street while also providing visibility into the park from the active street for safety and security. None of these parks, however, is planned to allow access directly to the creek.

One of the two parks along San Pablo Dam Road is an approximately 3/4 - acre extension of the existing Library Park. The existing dense vegetation will be thinned out to provide better visual connections between the road and the library and to improve security along the creek. A new footbridge will provide better pedestrian and bicycle connections directly to the library. This footbridge will be designed to avoid impacts on the creek or nearby residential properties. A wider sidewalk on the east side of the library along Appian Way also will be considered.

The second park is located at the intersection of Hillcrest Road and San Pablo Dam Road. This park of approximately 1/2 acres will also

contain a pedestrian bridge which will link the downtown to the residential areas on Via Verde.

- The third park is also approximately 1/2- acre and is located away from San Pablo Dam Road in an area along the creek that is surrounded by existing and planned future multifamily residential development, providing amenities for these residential area developments. The residential will also provide visibility and surveillance of the park for safety and security.
- A linear park along the south side of the creek provides connections between two of the small creekside parks. No direct access into the creek is planned. The linear park is not continuous east of Hillcrest Road. However, it is planned to provide a continuous connection westward along the creek from Hillcrest Road to Via Verde, extending to El Portal Drive, as shown on the plan.
- Private open spaces will be located in the new multifamily residential development areas. Although not publicly owned, development will be encouraged that makes these spaces as accessible to the public as possible, while still assuring safety and security for residents.

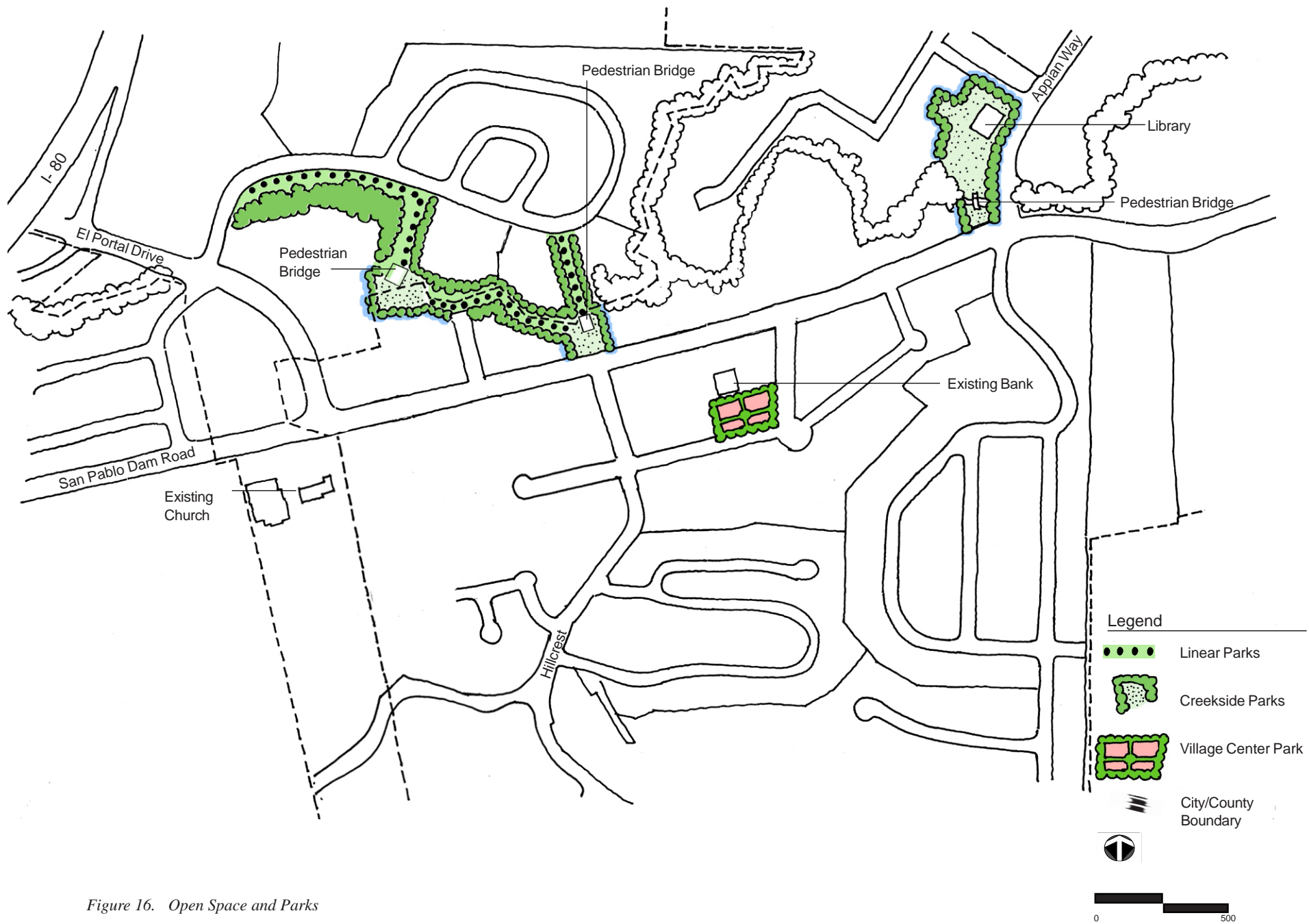


Figure 16. Open Space and Parks

Section 6. Urban Design Concepts

This section describes design concepts and guidelines for the development of streets, buildings, landscape and other physical elements of Downtown El Sobrante. These design concepts are intended to serve as a starting point and guide for the preparation of future detailed development plans, detailed specific plans, redevelopment plans and streetscape, landscape and architectural design studies.

Urban design concepts for five general areas follow:

- a. Village Center Design Concepts
- b. San Pablo Dam Road Design Concepts
Outside the Village Center (West Side Mixed Use District and East Side Mixed Use District)
- c. Mixed-Use Development Concepts
- d. Multi-family Residential Design Concepts
- e. Gateway Design Concepts

The urban design concepts are planned to reinforce the land use, circulation and open space framework of the downtown. Primary objectives of the urban design framework are to:

- Reinforce the hierarchy of public streets and public places throughout the downtown.
- Emphasize the importance of the Village Center as the civic heart of the new downtown.
- Define major gateways to the downtown that will notify motorists that they are entering a special pedestrian district requiring slower speeds and attention.
- Define design parameters for the development of new commercial and residential development that will help create an active, pedestrian-oriented, mixed use commercial district.



Entertainment use such as a theatre.

Upper level commercial office or residential.

Active ground floor uses (retail, restaurants).

Wide pedestrian sidewalks.

Village Center Design Concepts

The El Sobrante Village Center will be located in an area of approximately 25.5 acres served by four streets: Pitt Way on the east, Hillcrest Road on the west, a portion of San Pablo Dam Road on the north, and the new Village Center Drive on the south. These four streets form a major block which will be the focus of the Village Center.

This area currently contains considerable acreage of underutilized and vacant land as well as land that is being used for auto-related uses such as auto repair, storage for Pacific Bell vehicles, and auto sales, all of which will be relocated.

It is also one of the best opportunity areas in the downtown for a development which will create an early visible phase of action. Most of the concepts for the Village Center could be implemented soon through a partnership of public and private actions.

This will create a critical mass of development activity, stimulating further development throughout the downtown over time. Figure 17 illustrates a detailed plan concept for the Village Center.

Mixed Use

The Village Center will be the focus of mixed use activity in the downtown. It will be an ideal location for development which includes retail and restaurants on the lower levels with office and residential on the upper floors of buildings.



Figure 17. El Sobrante Village Center (Concept Sketch)

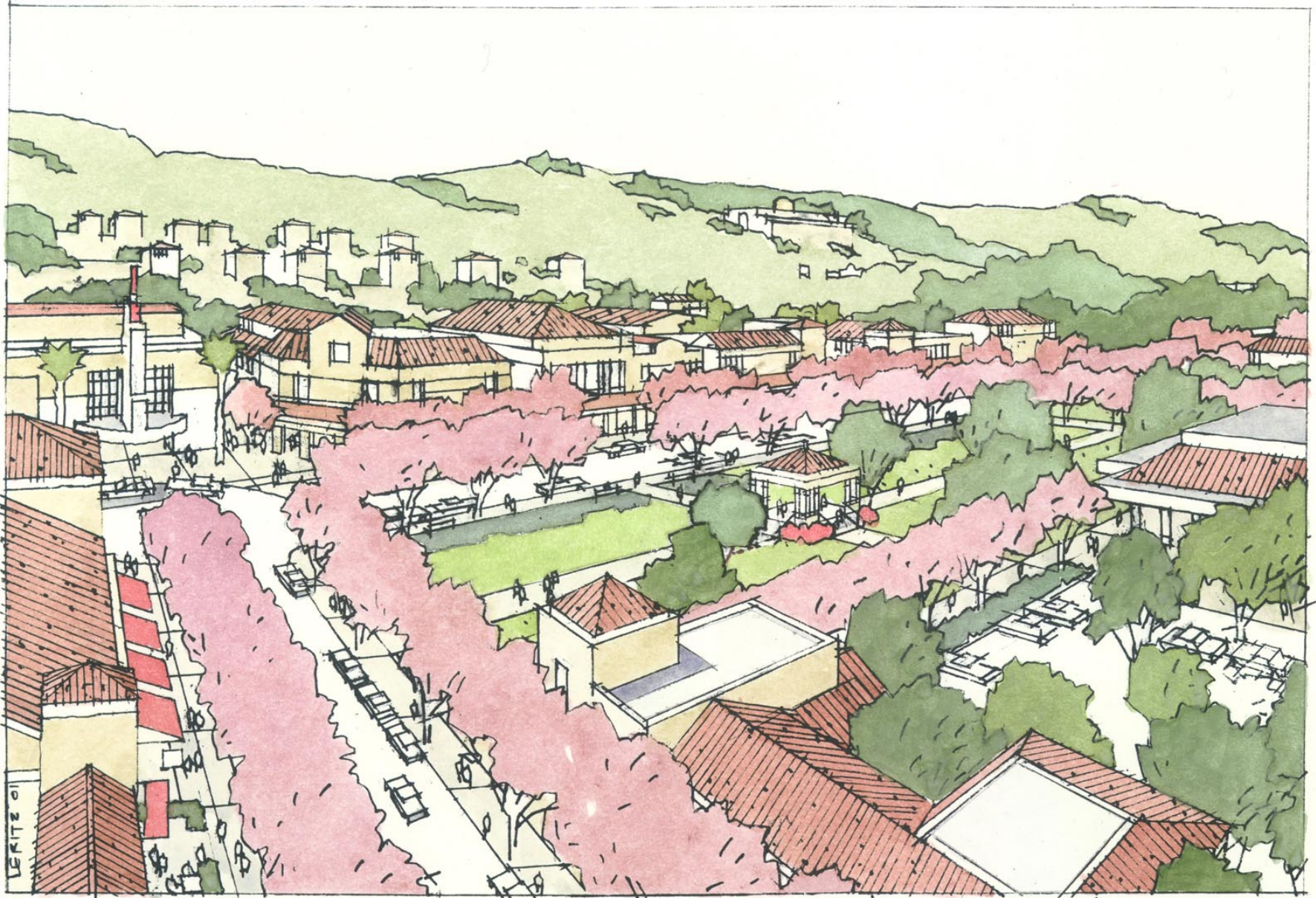


Figure 18. El Sobrante Village Center Aerial View (from San Pablo Dam Road and Pitt Way , looking south)

Village Center Streetscape Design

A unique streetscape design will define the four primary streets of the Village Center.

San Pablo Dam Road will be changed in this area to have four vehicle lanes with no median or center left turn lane. This allows the sidewalks on both sides of the street to be widened. There will be parking on both sides of the street, but because the parking lane will also function as a travel lane during peak travel hours, it will not be possible to incorporate corner sidewalk extensions (bulb-outs). However, this will be offset by the benefit of wider sidewalks.

Other streets in the Village Center (Pitt Way, Hillcrest Road and the new Village Center Drive) will be designed to have the character of a small downtown street with parking on both sides, bicycle lanes, and wide pedestrian sidewalks.

The wider sidewalks on the four streets of the Village Center will provide a more attractive place for shopping, outdoor cafes, and sidewalk amenities. Streetscape will include ornamental street trees which are unique to the four streets and public spaces

of the Village Center and attractive in every season. Street and pedestrian lighting which is also unique to the four streets and public spaces of the Village Center will reinforce this place as the center of the new downtown after dark.



Street trees.

Awnings.

Arcades allow development above with additional pedestrian circulation space.

Building setbacks from property line allow wider pedestrian circulation areas and areas for outdoor seating/dining.

Special area paving and sidewalk amenities



Figure 19. Section A.: Village Center Drive, section at Village Center Park (2 travel lanes, parking both sides, bike lanes)

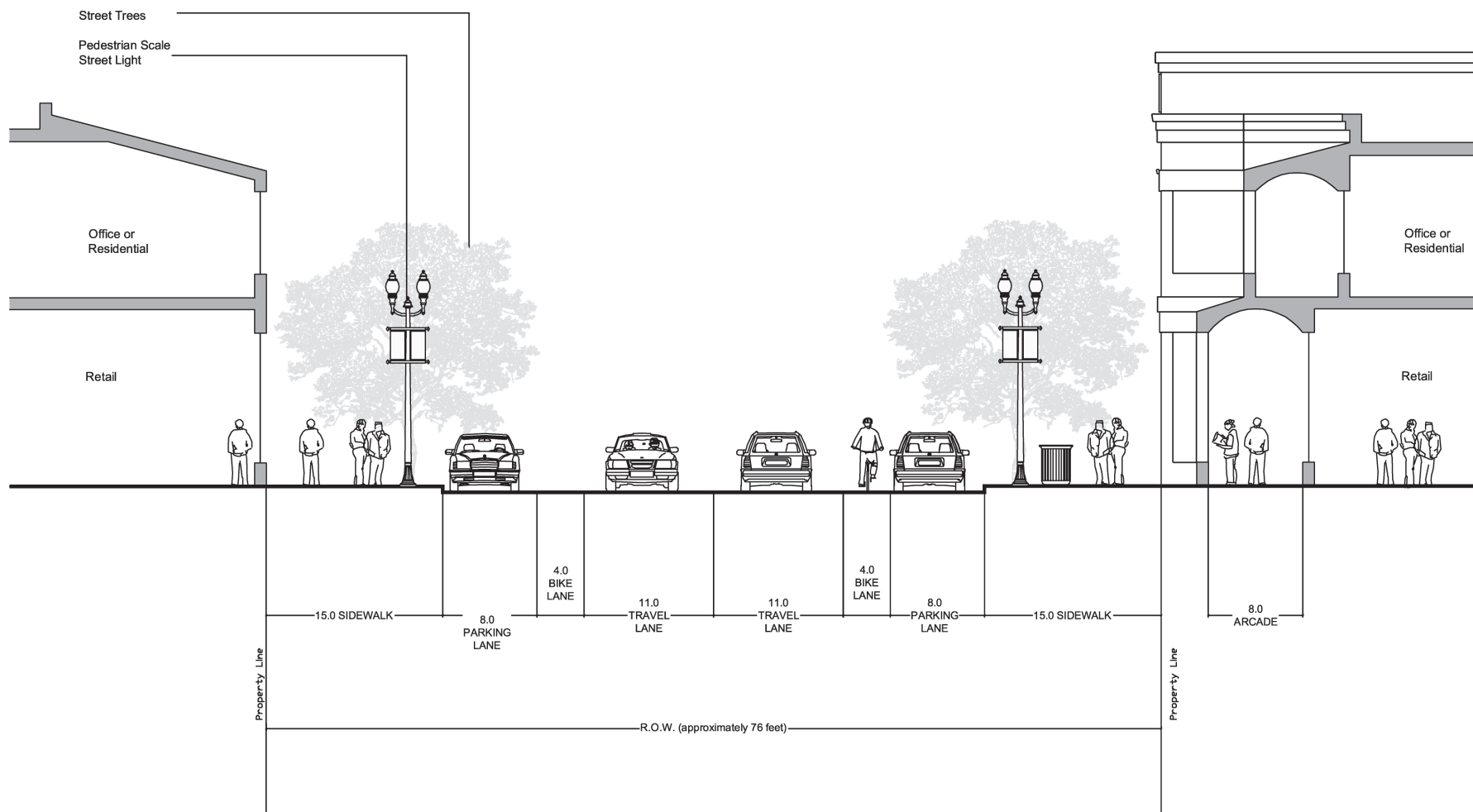
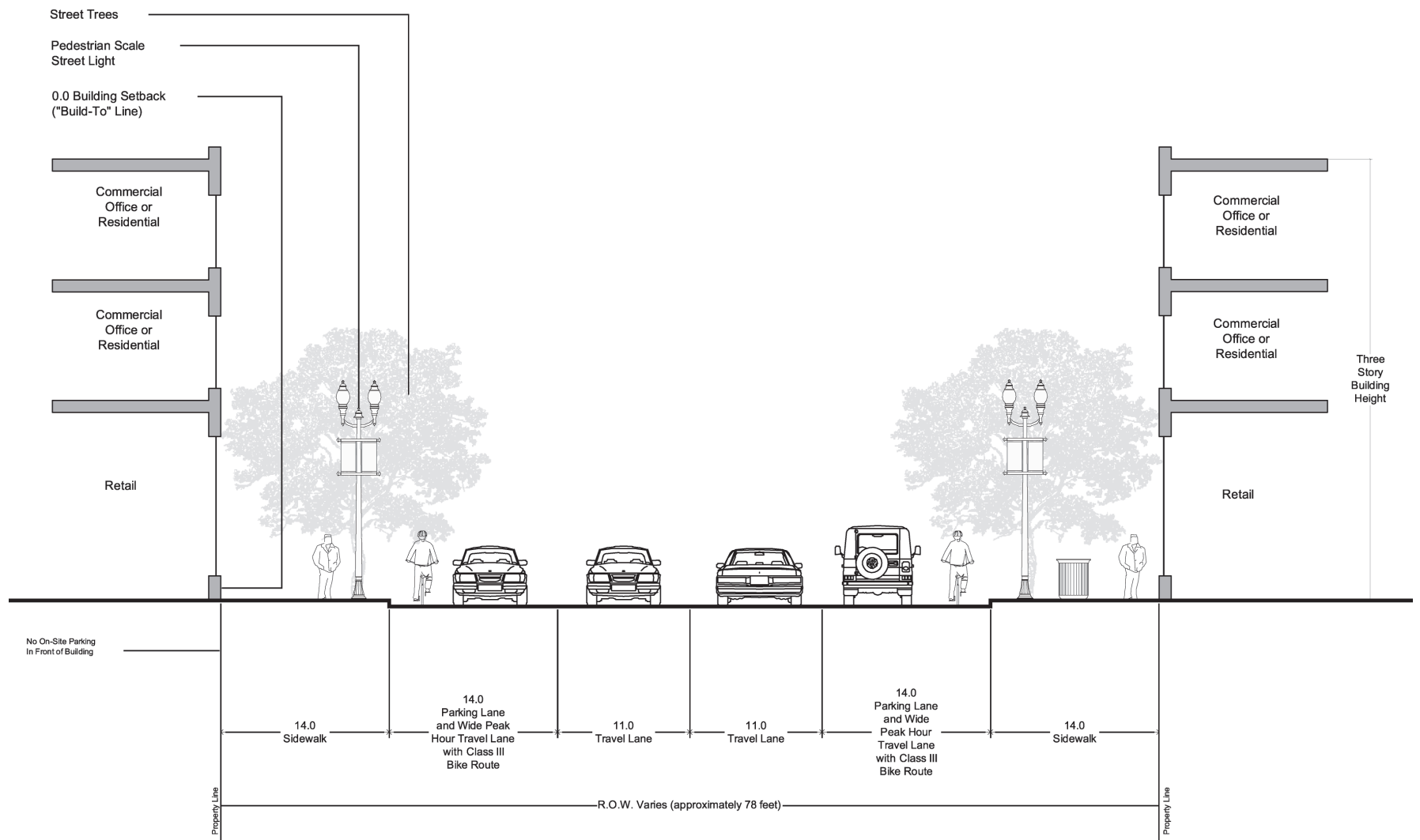


Figure 20. Section B.: Street Character in Village Center Drive, section at Pitt Way, Village Center Drive and Hillcrest Road (2 travel lanes, parking both sides, bike lanes)



Figure 21. San Pablo Dam Road in the Village Center (corner of Hillcrest Drive - looking east)



- 2 full time active lanes with 2 peak hour travel lanes
- off-peak parking only
- wide sidewalks
- no median

Figure 22. Section D.: San Pablo Dam Road Character in the Village Center

Village Center Park

Village Center Park is located in the middle of the Village Center. As the symbolic heart of Downtown El Sobrante, the approximately one-acre Village Center Park will be designed with a landscape expression that is uniquely different from any other park in the area. The park may be formal or informal in design, but it will be designed to provide flexibility for a multiplicity of uses, including public gatherings, outdoor lunches by downtown workers, and informal meeting places for shoppers and people doing business downtown.

The park will be open on all sides and visible from public streets and pedestrian corridors to make the space as public and safe-feeling as possible. Residential and commercial buildings which line the streets surrounding the park will help define the space and provide surrounding activity.



Surrounding mixed use development provides activity and definition.

Seating areas and open lawns provide places to gather and eat lunch.



Retail and residential surround the park.

Gazebo, bandshell, or community building provides a focal point to the park and a place for public events and gatherings.

San Pablo Dam Road Design Concepts
(Outside of the Village Center in the West
Side Mixed Use District and East Side Mixed
Use District)

San Pablo Dam Road outside of the Village Center District will have four travel lanes, parking on one side and a planted median. Therefore, sidewalks will be slightly narrower than those found in the Village Center portion of San Pablo Dam Road. In order to increase sidewalk width, buildings will be encouraged to set back 5' - 8' (maximum) to allow for increased pedestrian area under building overhangs or in arcades. Corner sidewalk extensions (bulb-outs) will be provided on the side of the street where parking is provided throughout this portion of San Pablo Dam Road.

Streetscape improvements will enhance the pedestrian area with trees and theme lighting designed to provide continuity along the street. Street trees will not be as ornamental as those along the Village Center streets in order to provide contrast and emphasis to the Village Center. However, the street trees will be selected to provide an attractive canopy over the street and give the street a strong sense of continuity and identity. Medians will be planted with upright trees and ornamental ground covers to further beautify these segments of the street.



Active ground floor uses

Corner sidewalk extensions allow space for pedestrian amenities, outdoor dining and other improvements



Curbside parking on one side of street

Small setback to increase pedestrian travel path



Corner sidewalk extensions on San Pablo Dam Road outside the Village Center provide opportunities for seating and other amenities

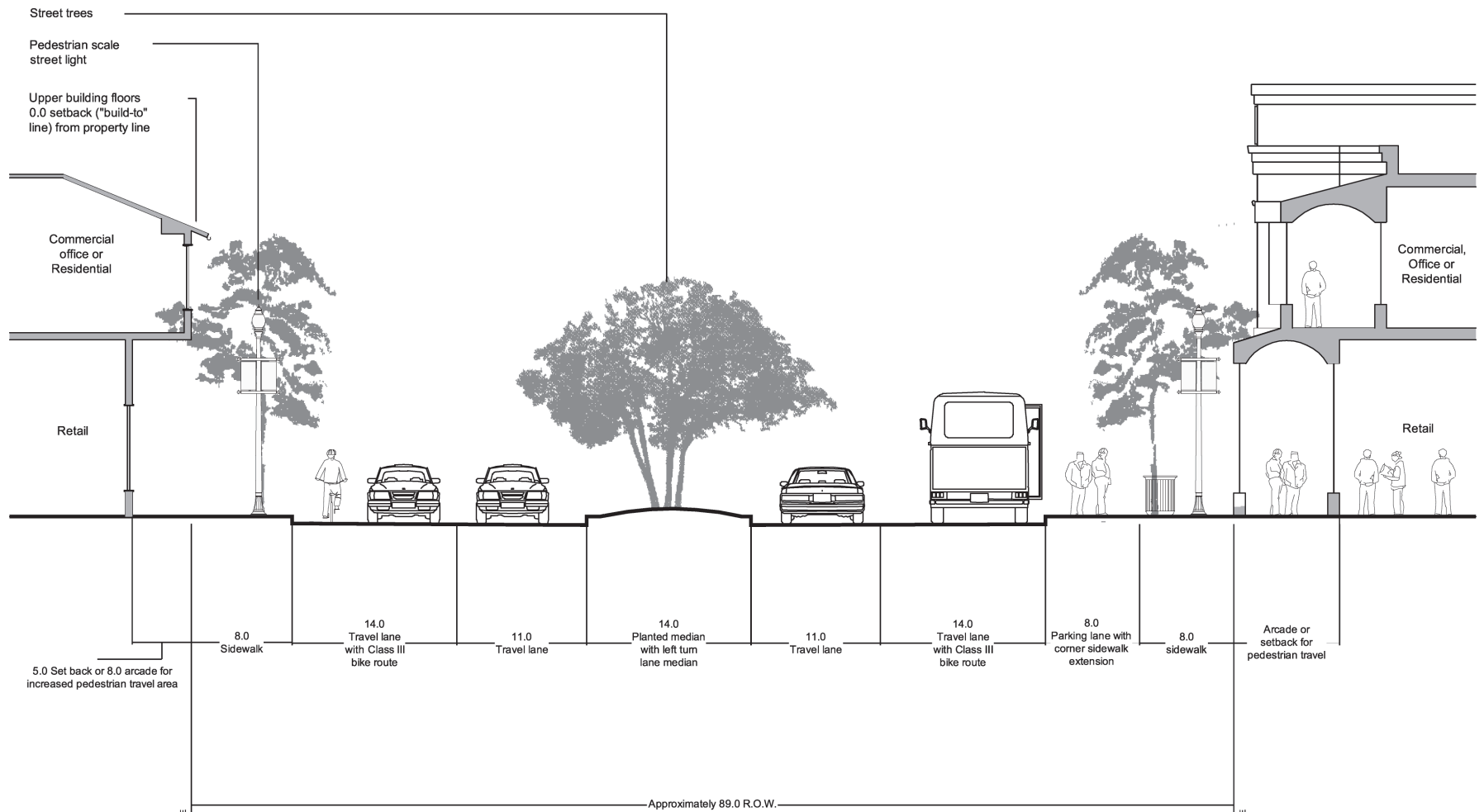


Figure 23. Section E.: San Pablo Dam Road Outside of the Village Center (with median)

Mixed Use Development Concepts

Mixed use along the entire length of San Pablo Dam Road and within the Village Center will be similar in terms of building design, character and use. Buildings will be located within 5'-8' of the street right of way line to create a defined street wall. Retail, restaurants and other active, pedestrian-oriented ground floor uses will be required. New auto-related uses, drive-in windows, parking and long expanses of blank building wall over 50' in length will not be allowed. A large proportion of ground floor building facades will be required to be transparent in

order to allow pedestrians and shoppers to view the activities inside and to allow light to spill out onto the street at night. Cafes and vendors will be encouraged to spill out onto the sidewalk to add activity to the area.

Residential uses in the upper levels of the buildings along streets in the mixed use areas will be encouraged. These residents will provide additional market support for the adjacent commercial and transit services. Office uses in upper levels will also be encouraged.



Upper level residential office uses.

Building aligned with street property line.

Pedestrian connections to internal courtyards and parking.

*Pedestrian entrances along street.
Streetscape improvements.*



Upper level residential or office uses.

*Active pedestrian-oriented ground floor uses (retail,
restaurants, art galleries.)
Public arcade provides additional pedestrian sidewalk
space.*

Multi-family Residential Design Concepts

All new residential development will be in multifamily development and will be of two general types:

- Mixed use development along San Pablo Dam Road and in the Village Center
- Multi-family groupings of townhomes, condominiums and flats. These are located primarily in two areas:
 - 1.) Along the southern area of the Village Center, providing a buffer between existing hillside single-family residential areas and the commercial activities of the Village Center, and
 - 2.) Adjacent to San Pablo Creek between Pitt Way and Appian Way.

The Land Use Framework diagram and Village Center Concept Sketch Plan (figures 11 and 17) illustrate planned locations for multifamily residential development. A new street (Village Center Drive East) will serve the multi-family area extending eastward from the Village Center subdistrict. This street will have a narrow 50' wide right-of-way to encourage slow traffic speeds. Parking will be located on one side of the street. Bicycle lanes will not be designated due to the small scale residential nature of the street.

Multi-family residential development will be required to provide front porches, balconies, and entrances facing the street in order to provide “eyes on the street” for safety and security. Garage entrances facing streets will be minimized to avoid long blank residential street walls devoted to automobile space. Examples of desirable multi-family residential design concepts follow.



On wider streets, parking located on both sides
Porches and balconies face the street

Planting strip with street trees

Sidewalks and small front gardens

Front porches and entries face the street



On narrow streets, parking is located on one side

Planting strip with street trees



Three story maximum height.

Residential buildings define streets.

No visible garages

Stairways and entries address the street.

Small recesses allow for front gardens which enhance the street



Windows and balconies view onto street to provide visual surveillance for safety, security, and neighborhood-friendly character.

On-street parking (no visible garages)

Small front gardens compatible with general character of nearby residential areas in El Sobrante.



Street trees

Multiple entries along the street

Small setbacks allow for gardens

Front porches and balconies

Multi-family Residential Design Concepts

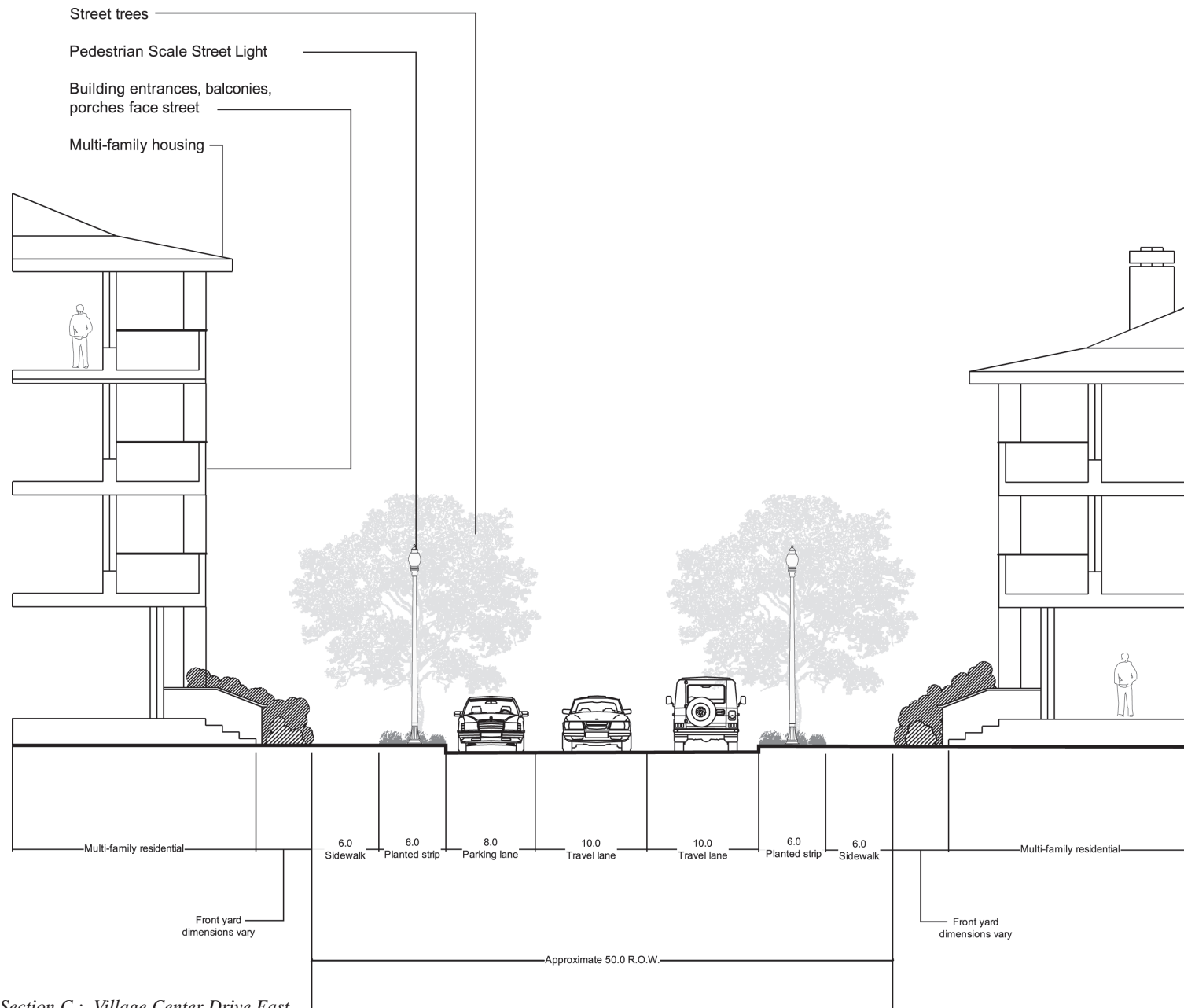


Figure 24. Section C.: Village Center Drive East

Gateways to the Downtown on San Pablo Dam Road

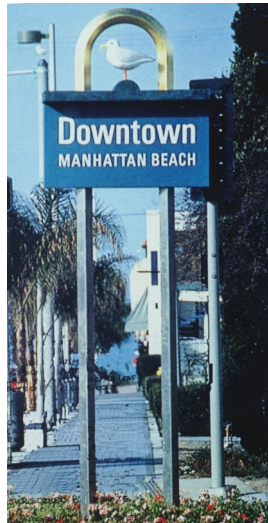
Major landscaped gateways to downtown El Sobrante will be created along San Pablo Dam Road at the intersections of El Portal Drive and Appian Way. They will also announce to approaching drivers that they are entering a special district where pedestrians are given equal priority to automobile traffic. These gateways will beautify the entrance to downtown through the use of ornamental planting, signage, sculptural elements and special lighting in order to define the gateway locations at night as well as in the daytime.

Due to the large scale of the San Pablo Dam Road intersections at El Portal Drive and Appian Way, the gateways to the Downtown must be of a significant scale. Since available land will be limited, vertical elements are appropriate.

Contemporary



Gateway to Exposition Park, Los Angeles



Gateway to Manhattan Beach, California

Traditional



Gateway to Stanford University



Gateway marker to San Anselmo, California

Examples of Potential Gateway Expressions:



Figure 25. Gateway to Downtown El Sobrante at El Portal Drive, looking east

Section 7. Landscape Framework

Generally, the landscape framework envisioned in downtown El Sobrante includes four types of landscape improvements.

- Public Streetscape
- Village Center Park
- Informal Landscape Improvements
- Natural Landscape Areas

Figure 26 illustrates the general location of these types of landscape improvements.

Public Streetscape

These improvements include plantings, lighting, street furnishings, signage, special pedestrian paving, public art and amenities that will be located along the streets of the downtown. Planned streetscape improvements are described in the Village Center and San Pablo Dam Road portions of the Urban Design Concepts section.

Village Center Park

The Village Center Park will have a landscape design that uniquely expresses downtown El Sobrante. A description of landscape improvements for the park is provided in the Open Space Framework section and in figures 17 and 18, which refer to Village Center Park.

Informal Landscape Improvements

Informal landscape improvements are located throughout the downtown public areas, notably in the pedestrian corridors that link hillside residential areas to the downtown and in the creekside parks and linear parks.

Adjacent property owners will be encouraged to care for these spaces, similar to the way such spaces are cared for in the Berkeley Hills, in San Francisco, and in various Marin County towns.

A mix of ornamental, background and accent plantings, paving and amenity features are appropriate in these spaces. Although the general landscape character is informal, at night a unified lighting scheme will be incorporated to help guide pedestrians and other users in appropriate directions.



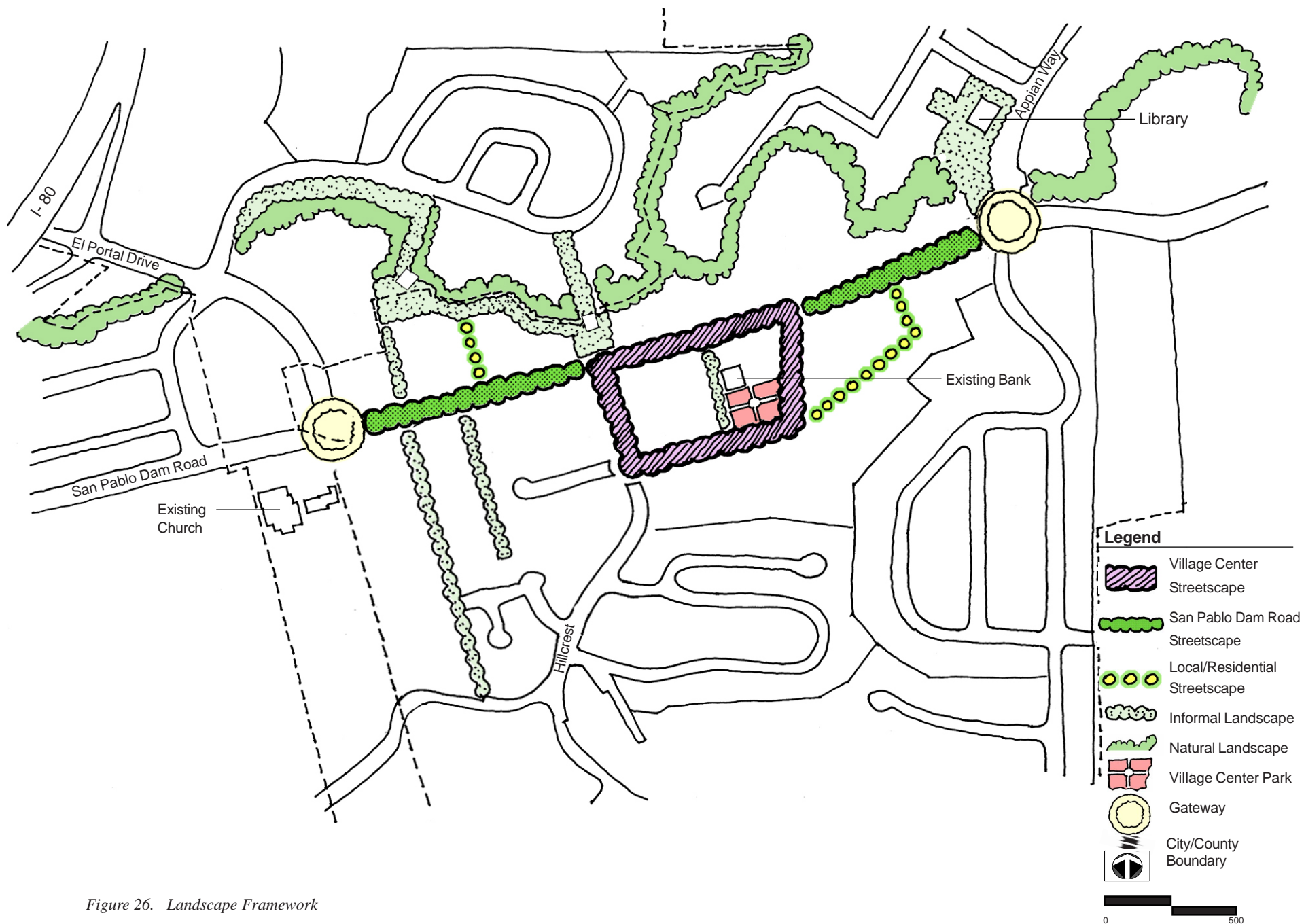


Figure 26. Landscape Framework

Natural Landscape

Natural landscape areas to remain are located primarily along the entire length of San Pablo Creek in the downtown. This natural landscape provides several benefits, including:

- An attractive backdrop to the downtown
- Wildlife habitat
- Buffer between nearby existing residential areas and commercial areas

In some areas the natural landscape along the creek will be selectively cleared and improved (in the vicinity of Library park, for example) to improve visibility between San Pablo Dam Road and other areas. Such improvements to natural landscape areas will also allow better surveillance, promote safety and security and generate better opportunities for people wishing to view the creek and its setting from creekside parks and businesses which overlook the creek. In order to protect sensitive wildlife habitat along the creek and prevent entry onto neighboring residential properties, however, improvement along the creek will be designed such that access into the creek itself will not be allowed.